

Fifty Splendid Summers

A Short History of the North Carolina Writers Conference 1950 - 1999

Published on the occasion of the Fiftieth Annual Meeting

July 30-31, 1999

Manteo

compiled by Charles Blackburn, Jr. and Robert G. Anthony, Jr.

Who Quoteth Extensively Herein from the Recorded Memories

and Reports—Accurate, Embellished, and or Erroneous—of

Assorted and Sundry Former Conference Chairs and Other Observers,

Honorable and Nefarious Alike, without Discrimination, in a Humble and

Respectful Effort to Preserve for the Membership the Story of the North

Carolina Writers Conference



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Published by the North Carolina Writers Conference
and the North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library
with generous support from the Paul Green Foundation

1999

Acknowledgments

In tracing the early years of the North Carolina Writers Conference, the compilers have relied extensively on *North Carolina Writers Conference: A Little Write-up*, published in 1967 by Bernadette Woodlief Hoyle, a ten-page booklet celebrating the first seventeen years. We also drew heavily on an updated history by H.G. Jones that was published in the printed program for the 1982 meeting.

Beginning in 1977, the North Carolina Writers Conference adopted a tradition of celebrating the life and work of one of its own at the annual Saturday night banquet. *Pembroke Magazine* at Pembroke State University, now the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, has faithfully published these annual tributes and, thus, is an indispensable source of information on the organization and its distinguished members, many of whom are in the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame.

The literary scrapbooks kept by the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library also proved an invaluable source of newspaper and magazine articles about the annual meetings.

To supplement these records, we asked the former conference chairs—thirty-two of them in all—to use newspaper reports by Sam Ragan, Betty Hodges, and Roy Parker, Jr., as a starting point for their recollections and reminiscences about this unique literary organization.

Over the years, the triumvirate of Ragan, Hodges, and Parker has provided a wonderful record of the North Carolina Writers Conference, and we borrowed liberally from their columns, appearing respectively in the Raleigh *News & Observer* and the *Southern Pines Pilot*, the *Durham Morning Herald* and the *Durham Herald-Sun*, and the *Fayetteville Observer-Times*. This little history is by no means exhaustive; there is still much ore to be mined in these newspaper columns.

We relied most heavily on Sam Ragan's "Southern Accent" column for the simple reason that Charles Blackburn had assembled all twenty-five hundred of them some years ago in connection with another project. Sam's column ran for forty-eight years, first in the Raleigh *News & Observer* (1948-1968) and then in the Southern Pines *Pilot* (1969-1996).

In 1993, Charles copied Sam's column from scrapbooks kept by the *Pilot* and enlisted the aid of six English graduate students at Duke University, who retrieved it from microfilm copies of the

News & Observer. The students were Joseph Merriam, Ryan Schneider, Andrea Selch, Katherine Little, Erin Sullivan, and Sarah Willburn. Special thanks also go to Katharine Pfeiffer, who was then assistant dean of the graduate school at Duke, for arranging a stipend for the students, and to Julie Tetel, director of graduate studies, who provided invaluable assistance with the project.

Two inveterate chroniclers, Mae Woods Bell and Linda Walters, have for many years taken photographs during the weekend, and we are grateful to have had access to their archives from which to select pictures for this publication and for use in a retrospective slide show for the fiftieth meeting. Additional illustrations were obtained from H.G. Jones, Sandy Hoyle Bolick, the Durham *Herald-Sun*, and the North Carolina Collection and Manuscripts Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library.

Frank Borden Hanes, Wilma Dykeman, and Holley Mack Bell, who chaired the Conference in the 1950s, were among those who responded with reflections. Sadly, none of the Conference chairs from the 1960s is surviving, but from 1970 on, with the lamentable exception of the beloved Tom Walters, all the Conference chairs are still with us. Until recently, one of the original group who made the trek to Manteo in the summer of 1950 was also holding forth. We regret to report that mountain writer John Parris died this spring at the age of eighty-four.

In the extended family that the North Carolina Writers Conference has become, many dear friends are gone, but many remain, and the Conference continues to be, as Hal Sieber described it in Bernadette Hoyle's *Little Write-Up* years ago: "An annual phenomenon, like a Capistrano convocation of swallows. A conference that goes without saying. A midsummer happening, without dues or rules."

The compilers wish to thank Linda and Shelby Stephenson for their assistance in proofreading the text. They also acknowledge with appreciation the fine work of UNC-CH Design Services in the Office of University Relations.

Charles Blackburn, Jr.

Robert G. Anthony, Jr.

Introduction

In August 1950, a small group of North Carolina writers made a special journey to Manteo on Roanoke Island, their purpose to show support for and appreciation of a fellow writer. They traveled to the historic island to attend, as a group, a performance of *The Lost Colony*, an outdoor drama written by their friend Paul Green. They hoped that their presence would be noted by the state's newspapers and radio stations and the public and thereby garner publicity for Green's work. While in Manteo, they also planned to meet informally to discuss being a writer in North Carolina. They had such a delightful weekend seeing the drama and visiting with each other that they resolved to meet again the following year. Thus, the annual North Carolina Writers Conference was born.

It is fitting that the origins of the Conference lie in an act of friendship, for the defining characteristic of this unique organization is the sincere interest its members have in each other. Every summer they gather to greet old friends and welcome newcomers to their ranks, to swap ideas and tell tales, to gossip a little and laugh a lot. But, above all, they come together to share with kindred spirits their individual stories of struggling with the pen and the blank page, of the disheartening failures that every writer experiences, but also, of the times—ah, those glorious times!—when success comes. Lambert Davis, director of the University of North Carolina Press who issued the call to Manteo in 1950, reported that at the first gathering “a kind of rapport was established that allowed people to let their hair down.” That rapport has continued and will, without a doubt, be present at the fiftieth meeting when the Conference returns to Manteo.

Conference members have had a significant impact on the cultural life of North Carolina. Collectively, their books number in the hundreds. Their countless short stories, poems, articles, and essays have graced the pages not only of the state's journals and magazines but also those of the nation's most respected publications. Their contributions to journalism are legendary.

The North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library acquires and preserves the writings of the citizens of the state. Among its most prized holdings are the works of Conference members. These works are also among those most frequently consulted by researchers. Because of the central role that the Conference has played—and continues to play—in the development of the literary arts in the Tar Heel state, the North Carolina Collection has enthusiastically joined in co-publishing this story of the Conference.

The pages that follow present an informal history of the Conference during its first five decades. It is, of course, an incomplete record, for it is impossible to describe in a brief booklet all the thoughtful presentations, stimulating panel discussions, and passionate conversations that have marked each gathering. The photographs accompanying the text help “people” the Conference record, but they are too few in number. The unavailability of images of several key members, plus cost, restricted the number of photographs that could be used. Nonetheless, the story of the North Carolina Writers Conference that follows, even though incomplete, documents the remarkable community found among writers in the Tar Heel state. Writing is a lonely craft, and North Carolina's writers are not exempt from loneliness. But, because of their special Conference, they know that they do not struggle alone.

Robert G. Anthony, Jr.
1999 Conference Chair and
Curator, North Carolina Collection

The First "Get-Together" Manteo

In the summer of 1950, a small group of Tar Heel writers met at Manteo, attended celebrity night at Paul Green's outdoor pageant *The Lost Colony*, and held an organizational meeting for what would become the North Carolina Writers Conference. Now celebrating its fiftieth meeting, the Conference remains, as its founders intended, a loosely organized, closely knit organization. Without constitution, bylaws, or dues, it brings together on the last weekend in July a group of professional writers who regard it as an annual "must."

From the very beginning, how to become a member was the best kept secret in the state. Membership is still by invitation only.



the group.

Back in 1950, Bernice Kelly Harris, Seaboard novelist, quoted Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paul Green as justifying the North Carolina Writers Conference on the grounds that barbers and sheriffs and plumbers met annually to talk over their mutual interests—why not writers?

It was Inglis Fletcher, whose novels on the Albemarle section of the state made her famous, who helped organize that first



*All but three of the founding members of the North Carolina Writers Conference gather on the stage of the Waterside Theatre at Fort Raleigh in Manteo on August 8, 1950, during a performance of Paul Green's *The Lost Colony*. Pictured are, left to right, Paul Green, Brennan Fagan, James Street, Marian Sims (partially bidden), Sam Selden, William Meade Prince, William T. Polk, John Parris, Josephine Niggli, John Harden, Inglis Fletcher, Chalmers Davidson, Paul Aden, and Gerald Johnson (who is in costume for a part in the drama). Absent from the stage were Huntington Cairns, Lambert Davis, and Betty Smith. (N.C. Collection, UNC-Chapel Hill Lib. Photo by Aycock Brown.)*



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS

Chapel Hill, N. C.

June 8, 1950

Mr. C. G. Davidson
Davidson College
Davidson, N. C.

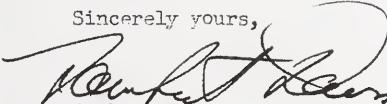
Dear Mr. Davidson:

I am writing to invite you to a get-together with North Carolina writers on Roanoke Island on August 8. The Lost Colony management has suggested that the Press act as sponsor and we are delighted to do so. As you probably know, the Lost Colony had great success last summer by having weekly celebrity nights, at which well known people from various walks of life took parts in performances. For this summer, it has occurred to us that there might be a special North Carolina writers' night, and that writers from all over the state would want to help in paying tribute to what is the state's finest collective contribution to the arts. And we thought we could combine this occasion with a North Carolina writers' conference to meet informally and discuss the problems that they share. Finally, the occasion could be a pleasant vacation for all of us.

Paul Green, Betty Smith, Inglis Fletcher, James Street, and Jonathan Daniels have all promised to come, and I am writing to ask if you can join the group which we hope will number thirty or forty writers. The Lost Colony will be our host for dinner and for the performance of the pageant that evening. We plan, in addition, on a get-together luncheon and an afternoon of discussion. We haven't yet decided whether it would be better to have one discussion group or to break the general group into several smaller discussion groups, and we'll be guided largely in this matter by the wishes of those who can attend. We are trying to arrive at the right combination of serious talk, informal conversation, and simple relaxation. We should be delighted to have your suggestions.

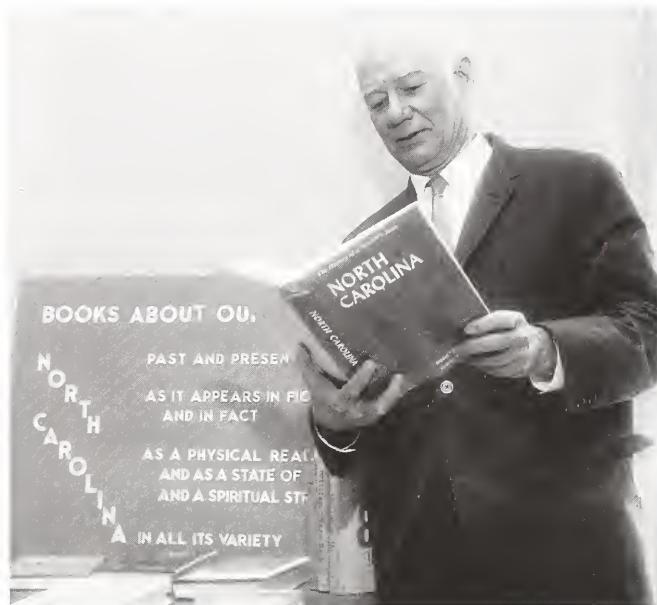
The affair will be Dutch, except for the dinner and the performance of the pageant. However, Mr. John Parker, general manager of the Lost Colony, in Manteo, tells me that his organization will be happy to arrange for accommodations for any of those attending who will write him. Perhaps you already have made vacation plans that would put you in the neighborhood on the 8th of August; if not, I hope the occasion will draw you. The invitation, of course, applies to wives or husbands of the writers invited. I look forward with great eagerness to your reply.

Sincerely yours,


Lambert Davis
Director

LD w

Letter from Lambert Davis, University of North Carolina Press director, inviting Chalmers Davidson to a "get-together of North Carolina writers" on Roanoke Island on August 8, 1950. (From the Chalmers Gaston Davidson Papers, #1646, in the Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.)



Lambert Davis, who issued the formal invitation in 1950 for writers to gather in Manteo, is pictured here at a 1965 display of University of North Carolina Press books about the Tar Heel state. As director of the Press, Davis published and enthusiastically promoted books by North Carolina writers and was a regular attendee at the Conference. (N.C. Collection, UNC-Chapel Hill Lib.)

meeting. She talked with Lambert Davis, director of the University of North Carolina Press, and Paul Green. Walter Spearman, professor of journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, was also in on the planning, as was Richard Walser, professor of English at North Carolina State University in Raleigh and author of numerous books, although he missed the first conference.

The UNC Press sent out the first invitations, but Lambert Davis could not see the Press in the role of continuing sponsor of the group. He insisted that "a writers' conference should be run by writers." In his 1982 history of the Conference, North Carolina Collection Curator H.G. Jones noted that, "In reading through Richard Walser's meticulously-kept files on the Writers Conference (now preserved in the Southern Historical Collection) and in browsing through Bernadette Hoyle's scrapbooks, one is struck by the genuine openness of the members who have one thing in common: a serious interest in writing."

The origin of the Conference is better documented than most of its subsequent meetings, Jones discovered, because of the care with which Lambert Davis prepared a formal report of the meeting. Officers of the Roanoke Island Historical Association annually held "celebrity nights" to help publicize Paul Green's outdoor drama, *The Lost Colony*. In Davis's words, "Mrs. Inglis Fletcher had the idea

that, instead of getting some literary celebrity to appear in the pageant, *The Lost Colony* might sponsor a meeting of North Carolina writers at Manteo."

Davis accepted Mrs. Fletcher's request that he draw up a list of writers and issue the invitations. In his letter of June 8, 1950, Davis invited forty-three writers to the celebrity night on August 8, 1950, and to "a writers conference to meet informally and discuss the problems that [we] share."

The following writers accepted the invitation and thus may be considered the founders: Paul Adler, novelist; Huntington Cairns, legal scholar and writer on art and literature; Chalmers G. Davidson, novelist and member of the Davidson College faculty; Lambert Davis, Brennan Fagan, Inglis Fletcher, Paul Green; John Harden, author and public relations executive; Gerald Johnson, author and editorial executive of the *Baltimore Sun*; Josephine Niggl, playwright and novelist; John Parris, Asheville newspaperman and author; William T. Polk, who wrote *Southern Accent*, for which Sam Ragan named his long-running newspaper column; William Meade Prince, artist and author; Marian Sims, Charlotte novelist; Betty Smith, novelist, whose *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* was a best-seller at the time; and James Street, novelist and short story writer. Others, like Walter Spearman and Richard Walser, assisted in the planning but were unable to attend the meeting.

Here is a portion of Lambert Davis's report of that first meeting:

It was evident from the start that an overwhelming majority wanted no formal organization. There were already enough formal organizations, enough vice presidents, enough committee chairmen. At the same time, an almost, if not exactly, as sizable majority seemed to feel that such meetings were desirable and should be continued. There was, naturally, a considerable variety of opinion as to the value such meetings would have, but perhaps most stressed were the opinions that meetings provided an opportunity for:

Shop Talk. About publishers, agents, markets, and so on. This is the common denominator of all talk between authors.

Craft Talk. Many writers have specific writing problems in the work that they are doing, and enjoy the opportunity to get helpful advice. This is, of course, not a matter for roundtable discussion but is possible in private conversations such as are the background of a conference.

True Confessions. A writer gets a great deal out of understanding that other writers have the same problems—the periods of barrenness, the sense of isolation, and so on. It surprised me that in the brief period of the business meeting a kind of rapport was established that allowed people to let their hair down. I think everyone felt this was a good thing.

Once the decision was made to hold another conference the following year, the Manteo group discussed at length who should be considered "writers" and therefore eligible for the invitation list. Davis wrote, "Confining the group to those who were professional in the sense that they lived entirely on their writing, it was generally agreed, was far too constrictive. On the other hand, it didn't seem possible to devise any formula that would make it certain that those invited were seriously interested in writing as against being seriously interested in being with writers. Miss Betty Smith made the most common-sensical suggestion in saying that the choice of those invited to the next meeting should be left up to those attending or invited to this meeting."

The problem of crafting the invitation list, Davis continued, "left the group with the absolute necessity of appointing a committee, and it was decided that though they would not be called a committee, Mrs. Inglis Fletcher and Messers. Walter Spearman and John Parris would be a group that would clear the list of people invited, and in general set in motion a plan to have another meeting in the summer of 1951."

"Thus," H.G. Jones noted in his 1982 history of the group, "at its very first meeting, the North Carolina Writers Conference adopted the principle that a committee is not a committee even if it looks, acts, and sounds like a committee. However, inasmuch as there is not a synonym for a non-committee committee, newspaper reports from the second meeting (held at Cherokee and Fontana Village in 1951) credited arrangements to a "committee—Walter Spearman, chairman, and Inglis Fletcher, John Parris, and Lambert Davis."

The first Conference was typical of succeeding ones—long discussions, heated arguments, shop talk on writing, trends and markets, and some comments on writing projects underway, although most professional writers are reluctant to talk about books until after they are published.

Each Conference has had its theme. For the first, it was "decision." Should it be formally organized? A constitution, by-laws, dues, officers? Those who had ideas about "formalities" were overruled. The majority disliked "organization." They had no intention of becoming enmeshed in parliamentary procedure. "Business" would receive the light touch. There would be no minutes to be approved, no budget to be adopted, no annual report to be read. One common bond would hold them together—writing.

A few policies were established, however, each subject to change. The first was the "east-west" decision. Since the first meeting was at Manteo, there was unanimous agreement to meet at Cherokee the next summer. In later years, however, the group had repeat meetings at Chapel Hill and Raleigh. It was decided that the site of the meeting was the chair's prerogative.

Officers were unnecessary, they decided. The Conference could function admirably if a chair and vice-chair were appointed each year to handle the next year's arrangements and program. A secretary-treasurer seemed essential. Walter Spearman was the first. Richard Walser, Bernadette Hoyle, Peggy Hoffmann, Julia Montgomery Street, Charlotte Blount, Betty Hodges, and Hal Sieber were among others to serve in that capacity in the early years.

Dues? No. The only expenses which could be foreseen were postage and mimeographing of notices and programs. "Pass the hat" was a practical and uninvolved method. This was done at the closing session each year, and the Conference remained solvent. Another policy involved families. Writers could bring wives, husbands, and children. It has made each Conference a vacation event as well as a professional one.

Perhaps the most significant policy established at Manteo was that the Conference would never go "on record" as endorsing or censuring any issue, controversial or non-controversial. Communism, civil rights, sex, sin, the bomb, the speaker ban law—all have been argued and dismissed. Each year a proposal is usually made that the Conference "take a stand." But an old timer always rises to the occasion and reminds the members of "The Policy." It is balm to injured feelings and rankled spirits. Good humor is restored.

Conference members are novelists, poets, essayists, biographers, historians, short story writers, feature writers, columnists, writers of juvenile fiction, editors, and publishers. Programs combine panel discussions and formal speeches. The members usually carry the major part of the program. Guest speakers have been editors, publishers, librarians, bookshop owners, literary critics, and out-of-state writers who are friends of members. ☒

1951

Cherokee and Fontana Village

Walter Spearman, arrangements chairman, with Inglis Fletcher, John Parris and Lambert Davis.

At Cherokee—the "Indian" Conference—held in 1951, a wigwam tourist court was the setting for what Walter Spearman termed the "give and take" sessions, where writers swapped stories. James Street's *The High Calling* had just been selected by a major book club, as had LeGette Blythe's *Bold Galilean* and Foster Fitz-Simons' *Bright Leaf*. Fred Ross had won the Houghton-Mifflin Literary Award with his novel, *Jackson Mabaffey*.

Ruth and Latrobe Carroll had a new juvenile book published, and Thelma and Corydon Bell's *Yaller Eye* had been selected by the Junior Literary Guild. Chalmers Davidson had completed a biography, *Piedmont Partisan*, and Frances Gray Patton, author of *Good Morning, Miss Dore*, had a collection of short stories, *The Finer Things of Life*, ready for publication.

As the *Asheville Citizen-Times* reported on August 12, 1951: "The conference gets under way late Sunday with a dinner at Sunset Farms where the writers will be welcomed by members of the Cherokee Historical Association. The theme for this session is 'Editor, Reviewers, Authors,' and will feature John Selby, chief editor for Rhinehart and former book editor of the Associated Press in New York."

The CHEROKEE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, Inc.

Cherokee, N. C.

Second Annual

NORTH CAROLINA WRITERS' CONFERENCE

August 12-14, 1951

PROGRAM

Sunday.....6:00 P.M.....Dinner at Sunset Farms
(Sunset Farms located on highway 107 between Cherokee and Sylva at Wilmot. Sign on right side of highway pointing to dirt road to left leading to Sunset Farms.)

8:00 P.M.....Performance of "Unto These Hills" at Mountaintop Theatre.

Monday.....9:00 A.M.....Tour of Cherokee Reservation

12:30 P.M.....Lunch at Boundary Tree Dining Room

2:30 P.M.....First Session of Writers' Conference
Subject: "Editors, Reviewers, Authors", featuring John Selby, Chief Editor for Rhinehart.

6:00 P.M.....Guests of the Cherokee Historical Association at a performance of The Lububs in authentic Indian Dances at Mountaintop Theatre.

Tuesday.....9:30 A.M.....Leave Cherokee by automobile for Fontana Village.

12:30 P.M.....Lunch as guests of Fontana Village.

2:30 P.M.....Second Conference Session, Subject: "North Carolina Material for North Carolina Writers", led by Mrs. Inglis Fletcher.

5:30 P.M.....Cocktails

6:30 P.M.....Dinner, guests of Fontana Village

8:00 P.M.....Entertainment-Recreational Hall



In 1952, the Conference met in Edenton, with sessions at several locations in the historic town, including the Chowan County Courthouse, constructed in 1767. The heat that weekend was so great that several men attending the Conference sought late-night relief by fleeing the hotel for the courthouse green, where they slept around the Confederate memorial shown on the right. (N.C. Collection, UNC-Chapel Hill Lib.)

John Harden of Greensboro, author of *The Devil's Tramping Ground*; Thad Stem of Oxford, *Picture Poems*; John Parris of Sylva, *The Cherokee Story*; journalist Sam Ragan, and Margarette Smethurst, newspaper columnist, both for the *News & Observer*, were among those present. The Asheville paper listed among the others expected: Elizabeth Boatwright Coker of Blowing Rock, author of *Daughter of Strangers*; Frank B. Hanes of Winston-Salem, *Abel Anders*; Lettie Rogers of Greensboro, *South of Heaven*; Tom Wicker of Winston-Salem, whose *The Live Oaks* was due out that fall; Elliott Merrick of Swannanoa, *Frost and Fire*; John McKnight of Chapel Hill, whose *The Papacy* was forthcoming; Dixie Hunter of Winston-Salem, Lodwick Hartley of N.C. State University, and William T. Polk of Greensboro, all three short story writers; George Stephens of Asheville, editor of *The Southern Packet*; Bob Sain, book editor of the *Charlotte News*; Harry Golden of Charlotte, *Jews in America*; and Don Shoemaker, editor of the *Asheville Citizen*.

An Asheville editorial writer later expressed surprise at finding authors sitting like regular people under shade trees in an Indian village. Margarette Smethurst wrote: "But I didn't hear anybody say that he or she objected to being compared to a bunch of shoe salesmen on vacation or anyone claim to be other than just people." 

Program for the second annual North Carolina Writers Conference held at Cherokee on August 12-14, 1951. (From the Chambers Gaston Davidson Papers, #1646, in the Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.)



Norelist Inglis Fletcher greets fellow writers at the 1952 North Carolina Writers Conference in Edenton. Pictured, left to right, are James Street, Frank Borden Hanes, Lucy Street, Inglis Fletcher, and John Harden. (Photo by Bernadette Hoyle.)

1952 Joseph Hewes Hotel, Edenton, and Bandon Plantation

Richard Walser, arrangements chair, with Frank Borden Hanes and Margarettte Wood Smethurst.

Edenton was the "hot" Conference, when in 1952 the temperature soared to 105F, which drove some of the men to sleep on the village green instead of in the steaming hotel rooms. The writers met in historic settings—the Joseph Hewes Hotel, the county courthouse, and Bandon Plantation, home of Inglis and John Fletcher. Mrs. George Wood and Mr. and Mrs. Frank L. Williams entertained at a buffet supper at Greenfield Plantation; Mrs. R. F. Eliot entertained at a luncheon; and the ladies of the local Daughters of the American Revolution chapter conducted a tour of historic sites.

The writers mopped perspiration and argued over the effect of television on reading habits and writing. Paul Green declared that "Folks said the phonograph would kill the piano, that *The Common Glory* (his Williamsburg outdoor drama) would kill *The Lost Colony*, that talkies would hurt the movies, that movies and radio would hurt reading. But when *Wuthering Heights* was produced, more copies of the book were sold than ever before.... I,

being an optimist, think television and visual aids are wonderful. This is a new medium for the writer—everything he writes will be used."

There was concern that "the mere amount of time spent in watching television" would prevent reading. But James Street countered with the opinion that "There is nothing wrong with fiction that a good book can't cure."

Ovid Pierce's first novel, *The Plantation*, had just been accepted; Burke Davis, who had had three books published, was working on a fourth; Mebane Holoman Burgwyn had a new teenage book ready, *Penny Rose*. Other attendees included Frank Borden Hanes and John Harden.

At the outdoor supper at Bandon Plantation, an electrical storm forced the writers inside. In darkness, then candlelight, they continued their shop talk—the subject:

historical accuracy in fiction. Jimmie Street's wife, Lucy, got the recipe for "Bandon Beans" from the Fletchers' cook. Mebane Holoman Burgwyn autographed a Japanese fan for Margarettte Smethurst: "Memories of a hot time in an old town."

Looking back on it in 1999, Frank Borden Hanes provided the following notes on that year's gathering: "The world's sultriest weekend, with some of us lying in tubs late, thence to the Confederate monument on the green, searching for a cool gasp. Jimmie Street: 'All my life I've wondered what these monuments were good for. Now I know.'" And finally, to Inglis Fletcher's Bandon Plantation and "big, blessed thunder as she read by candlelight and rain from a late manuscript.... Images only, here and there, with their flashes far fewer and fewer." 

1953 Blue Ridge Tourist Court, Boone

**Frank Borden Hanes, chair; Richard Walser, secretary;
Walter Spearman, program chair.**

At Boone the writers were feted by the Rhododendron Book Club, were guests of the outdoor drama *Unto These Hills*, and were entertained at a buffet dinner by Elizabeth Boatwright Coker and her husband, James Coker, at their Blowing Rock summer home.

Charlotte Hilton Green, Raleigh nature writer, missed the Conference—she was on a jaunt to Africa. Marion Brown (*The Southern Cook Book*) was present, and Harry Golden. Leonard Burgess, author of juvenile books, was there, as were Hoke Norris, then a Winston-Salem journalist and author (later in Chicago), and Elliott Merrick, of Swannanoa. Other attendees included Ruth and Latrobe Carroll, Walter Spearman, Burgess Lovett, Evangeline Davis, Holley Mack Bell, Frank Borden Hanes, Bernice Kelly Harris, Mebane Burgwyn, Lodwick Hartley, Fred Ross, Lambert Davis, Mary Gilbert, William T. Polk, Noel Houston, John Harden, and Chalmers Davidson.

LeGrette Blythe showed how he used a tape recorder in writing *Miracle of the Hills*, the story of Dr. Mary Sloop of Crossnore. There was lively talk about North Carolina material for writing led by Wallace Carroll. Chalmers Davidson wore a gay sports jacket and Jimmie Street quipped: "Chalmers must have sold a story to *Esquire* and taken it out in trade."

Frank Borden Hanes provided some reflections on the 1953 gathering for this fiftieth meeting write-up:

Jimmie Street: off the wagon; no longer the great chevalier de taste de thé; cold-eyed stoned in a motel room, looking at me bard and straight: 'I told Noel (Houston) if you showed up, I'd throw your ass over the rail.' All packed neatly, standing impeccably short-sleeved over traveling valise. Ready, as Noel had vowed, to take off for some nebulous destination north at three a.m. (from family, friends and Conference). Jimmie, my friend. The youngest ordained Baptist preacher in history (at seventeen years). We talked him down somehow and listened to his taut grunts next morning.

Hanes declares Bernice Kelly Harris was "a lady so severely comely that she could bring the brash of Jimmie to stock-still mutterance." And Elizabeth Boatwright Coker was "a red-headed stunner who showered us with largesse and trailed the sensual intoxicants of her mansion romances." 

1954

Durant's Motor Court, Hatteras

Noel Houston, chair; Richard Walser, secretary.

The thirty writers voted to go to Hatteras the next summer, and in 1954 they migrated to the Outer Banks, lived in apartments and motels, and held sessions in the Coast Guard Station. Their constant companions were the mosquitoes. Holley Mack and Clara Bell, who had suggested Hatteras, were apologetic but helpless. Insect repellent had priority.

David Stick spoke on "The Dare Coast Country"; John Ehle on "Writers, Movies, and TV." Harry Golden delivered a memorable hour-long speech on "The Writer and His Conscience." Sam Byrd, just returned to his native Carolina to edit a weekly newspaper, a long-time dream, was present for his first and only Conference, and had with him his beautiful bride. He died the following year.

Wilma Dykeman Stokely and her husband, James, were among the new faces. Wilma's first book, *The French Broad*, had just been accepted. It was Jimmie Street's last Conference. A consistent best-selling author, he insisted that "Some day I'll write what I think is a really good book." Two months later he suffered a fatal heart attack.

Sam Ragan reported in the *News & Observer* that "Noel Houston was chairman, but he didn't have a great deal of chairing



Left to right, Jonathan Daniels, Inglis Fletcher, Bernice Kelly Harris, and Richard Walser share smiles over a writing sample at the 1955 Conference at Pisgah Valley Ranch, near Asheville. (Photo by Bernadette Hoyle.)

to do—the Conference just sort of rolled along.... It was interesting to hear Bill Polk pose some puzzles about the South, to discuss in learned fashion some of the material to challenge writers.... He has written at length himself on the subject of Southern violence, particularly on the fact that North Carolina leads all other states in murder and aggravated assaults. But he doesn't know why. Several persons, such as Harry Golden, Tom Wicker, and Sam Byrd, offered explanations—economics, a double standard of justice among the races etc. That was one suggestion as a field for further exploration by Southern writers. But there were many more, just as interesting and just as challenging...."

Holley Mack Bell reported in 1999 that, "The Hatteras meeting is still—forty-four years later—a vivid remembrance. Mosquitoes. Who could forget those mosquitoes? They could put a proboscis all the way through a man's shirt and undershirt and leave bloodstains on the outside of the shirt. Who has ever seen one like that since?" 

1955 Pisgah View Ranch near Asheville

Wilma Dykeman Stokely, chair; Richard Walser, secretary.

For this history, Wilma Dykeman sent the following reflections on the Conference and her year as chair. "My first North Carolina Writers Conference was in 1954 at Cape Hatteras. My first book, *The French Broad*, not the memoir of a lively young woman but one of the Rivers of American Series, was published that spring and, I suppose, qualified me to attend."

It was, she said, a most meaningful experience.

I look now at the photograph taken at Hatteras and feel enormous respect and appreciation for this talented, varied group of writers, many of whom were also part of our gathering the following year.... Since this was my first acquaintance with the group I was stunned when James Street nominated me (or should I say pronounced me, so great was his influence on this group) to be chair-hostess for the following year. We would meet in Asheville or vicinity. James Stokely, my husband, had already read and even owned (!) books by most of these North Carolina authors and at Hatteras engaged in many lively conversations, so he would indeed be a partner in shaping that meeting in the mountains.

The 1955 meeting was the "lost" Conference, when most of the members missed the sign and wound their way toward Pisgah's

lofty heights. By nightfall, all had found their way to the rustic lodge and surrounding cabins. Pisgah View Ranch, in the shadow of that lofty peak and its national forest, was a comfortable old farm house featuring abundant family-style meals for guests in the surrounding rustic cottages. A barn had been converted to an upstairs meeting and recreation room. Gardens, meadow, woods provided atmosphere.

"Even Jonathan Daniels was contented with his accommodations," Dykeman said. "With the eastern Carolinian's suspicion of frontier life in the mountains, he had written earlier to make sure that he would have indoor plumbing—indeed, a private bath."

"There was a slice of moon in the western sky and a cloud drifted down over Mt. Pisgah," Sam Ragan said in his "Southern Accent" column. "A mountain stream tumbled over the rocks, and down in the valley a dog barked. But these sights and sounds were lost to the gathering of writers who talked on and on into the night, and resumed the talk next day. And along about mid-afternoon of the second day of the Writers Conference a member mused that it was misnamed. It should be called a Talkers Conference, he said."

Talk continued as spontaneously as water flowing in the mountain stream, interrupted momentarily by the program. Dykeman and her husband had arranged for Saturday and Sunday. George McCoy, of Asheville, talked on "Thoughts on Writers and Mountains," and Inglis Fletcher, on "Writers and the Land Around Them." There was a session on juvenile writing and one on the magazine field, this conducted by Demaree Bess, retired *Saturday Evening Post* editor.

There was an unscheduled debate about a book's royalty advances and how generous they should be. One "old pro" said he always asked for as much as his agent could squeeze from a publisher, while an equally "old pro" advised that he never wanted an advance because he feared that when the publisher had received that return from sales he would slacken the sales efforts.

There were discussions of "Southernness" in writing, private conversations about politics, and some fairly heated exchanges about the gathering storm clouds concerning the 1954 Supreme Court decision on school desegregation. These were citizen-writers with strong opinions about their region and their country. Even with sharp differences they managed to have civil conversation. For the most part.



Burke Davis and Harry Golden

N.C. COLL., UNCP-CHAPEL HILL LIB.

There was one special participant whose writing had addressed social issues through the better part of the century. Olive Tilford Dargan, whose pen name was Fielding Burke, not quite five feet tall, had published the first of her many volumes of poetry, plays, stories, and novels in 1904. After moving to North Carolina she had written with humor and understanding about her mountain neighbors and those who had gone to work in the piedmont mill towns. "She moved slowly," Dykeman recalled, "but spoke firmly and fixed us all with the gaze of her wide blue eyes as she read a recent poem. Harry Golden, celebrated newspaper publisher and humorist, defined her words as 'an affirmation of life, of love for the people and the land on which they live.'"

Response to a Saturday afternoon visit with Mabel Wheaton, Thomas Wolfe's sister, was also lively. In the sitting room and sun porch of the Old Kentucky Home, writers listened to her detailed and passionate memories of the brother and turbulent family that had once roamed those halls, huddled by the fireplaces, eaten, quarreled, laughed, and died in those rooms. "Mabel was enormously pleased that these North Carolina writers wanted to visit her and this house," Dykeman recalled. "She had, of course, arranged for refreshments and the gladiolus that accompanied any of her social encounters. And she urged guests to visit the exhibit of 'Tom's work' at Pack Memorial Library."

A memorial session was held for James Street. In his "Southern Accent" column, Sam Ragan reported that Noel Houston, Harry Golden, and Jonathan Daniels talked about Street's "great capacity for friendship, his impatience with sham and fraud, his genius with words that cut through the fog to the clearly obvious." Everyone agreed it was a good Conference, but each writer who had known Jimmie Street drove the long miles home conscious of his absence. 

1956 Carolina Inn, Chapel Hill

John Harden, chair, with Bernadette Hoyle and Walter Spearman, arrangements committee; Richard Walser, secretary.

The writers chose the Piedmont section in 1956 when the Conference met at the Carolina Inn in Chapel Hill for the biggest meeting to date. The Walter Spearmans were hosts at a garden party, and the Paul Greens at a dinner. The University Press also entertained the group, with the Lambert Davises as hosts.

Dave Morrah talked on "Writing Humor"; Evangeline and Burke Davis conducted a session on book reviewing. Bernadette

Hoyle presided at a panel on biography, composed of Chalmers Davidson, Phillips Russell, and Manly Wade Wellman. There was a session on fiction, and Walter Spearman presided at a session on "The Writer and the University," with Lambert Davis, Andrew Horn, and George Simpson participating.

Writing in the October 1996 issue of *Modern Maturity*, retired *New York Times* columnist and editor Tom Wicker admitted being awestruck by the NCWC when he was an aspiring young writer for the *Winston-Salem Journal*. "Among its members," he said of the Conference, "were such bona fide pros as James Street, who was reputed even in those modest days to be paid \$5,000 for 5,000 words by *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, and *Cosmopolitan* for such stories as 'Nothing Sacred' and 'The Biscuit Eater.'" Paul Green, Inglis Fletcher, and Bernice Kelly Harris were among the other Conference luminaries he greatly admired.

Having published a paperback potboiler called *Get Out of Town* under a pseudonym, Wicker was invited to speak at the 1956 NCWC, where he says he learned a valuable lesson. "No doubt I should have been intimidated to speak before such a group," Wicker wrote in *Modern Maturity*, "but among my many certainties in those days were that (a) I would sooner rather than later be a great writer, and (b) if you tried hard enough, life would fulfill your expectations."

When the time came, he rose and spoke reverently of the mysteries and beauties of Art, Literature and Life and The Writer's Responsibility to a bemused audience at the Carolina Inn. Afterwards, following "polite applause, of no great duration," Jonathan Daniels, editor of the *Raleigh News & Observer*, came up and offered him a word of advice. "Young man," Daniels said, "never be a solemn ass."

"It was the best advice I ever received," Wicker wrote, "a welcome reminder, over the years, that few things are more self-destructive than taking yourself too seriously." 

1957 Governor Tryon Hotel, New Bern

**Mebane H. Burgwyn and Tom Wicker, co-chairs;
Bernadette Hoyle, secretary.**

The elegance of the Governor Tryon Hotel (which later burned) in New Bern, gave the 1957 Conference a touch of luxury. Extracurricular activities included a party given by Jonathan and Lucy Daniels in their suite. The Eastern Carolina Yacht Club hosted a yachting trip.

Jonathan's daughter, Lucy Daniels, and her husband, Tom Inman, had just returned from their honeymoon. Lucy's first book, *Caleb, My Son*, was making a splash with good sales and reviews. She was on leave of absence from her newspaper job, with a Guggenheim Fellowship. Doris Betts, whose first novel, *Tall Houses in Winter*, had won acclaim, was among those present. Hal Sieber, Chapel Hill poet, then a Washington, D.C., speechwriter, was there, and Sam Ragan, Tom Wicker, Peggy Hoffmann, Ina Forbus, and Julia Montgomery Street.

The program included Sylvia Stallings, *New York Times* book reviewer. Fred Ross discussed newspaper work as a background for writing, and Bernice Kelly Harris charmed everyone with "People in Books," in which she shared her secret of character selection. New Bern was the "reunion" Conference, and the long "after sessions" lasted till the early morning hours. 

1958 Sedgefield Inn, Greensboro

**Holley Mack Bell, chair; Richard Walser, director;
Bernadette Hoyle, secretary.**

The 1958 Conference at Sedgefield Inn, Greensboro, was the "late" Conference. No session began on time, writers were late to everything but the cocktail hour, even the farewells were late, as little groups lingered on Sunday morning.

Jonathan Daniels and LeGette Blythe had new books out, and Harry Golden's first book, *Only in America*, was going into its third printing. Dick Walser moderated a debate by Tom Wicker and Sam Ragan on whether or not to write a novel. Nell Wise Wechter moderated a panel on the problems of juvenile writers. Thad Stem's poetry session was titled "The Ubiquitous Muse." George Stevens, managing editor of J.P. Lippincott Company, talked on "The Publisher and the Author."

New members included Jonathan Williams, poet and publisher of Highlands; Bill McNally and Bill Loftin, Charlotte publishers; and Jan Cox Speas, Greensboro author.

Holley Mack Bell reflected on his year as chair for this history. "The 1958 meeting may have been the 'late' Conference, as Bernadette Hoyle remembered it, but for me, it was the 'surprise' Conference." He was under the distinct impression that he had resigned from the Conference, fatigued by unremitting pressure from Dick Walser to "write that book about Bertie County." But instead of being allowed to resign, he was chosen chairman at the New Bern Conference with instruction from co-chairs Tom Wicker and Bernice Kelly Harris to organize a meeting at the Sedgefield Inn.

"Bernadette, God rest her soul, drew the cloak of silence over an ill-fated short story session," Bell recalled. "Writers had been asked to contribute a specimen to be critiqued. Time for the meeting drew closer and closer, but no short stories came in. At the last minute the chairman leaped into the literary vacuum with a contribution. Lucy Daniels Inman critiqued it. No publisher stepped forward with an offer." 

1959 Carolina Inn, Chapel Hill

Fred Ross, chair; Ina Forbus, vice-chair; Richard Walser, director; Peggy Hoffmann, secretary.

In 1959 the Conference returned to Chapel Hill, where Ina Forbus and her husband, Sample, had a lawn party, and Lambert and Isabella Davis and the University Press entertained at the Davis home.

Panels dominated. Jim Chaney moderated the book page editors; John Harden moderated the book sellers—Alice Straughan, C.R. Smith, and Charles Sembower. Austin Olney, editor, of Houghton-Mifflin, talked on "A Publisher's—Eye View of Manuscripts." Among those present were Evan Brandon, Zoe Kincaid Brockman, O.B. Hardison, and Guy Owen. Conference chairmen, remembering the "late" Greensboro meeting, had a pert note on the program: "Sessions will begin on time."

Following the meeting, Sam Ragan told readers of his "Southern Accent" column that, "This year may well be the most productive in many seasons for Tar Heel writers, if reports of works in progress or scheduled for publication are any gauge." A quick survey at the NCWC showed books already or soon to be released included Inglis Fletcher's *Cormorant's Brood* from Lippincott; John Ehle's *Kingtree Island* from Morrow; Harry Golden's *For 2¢ Plain* from World; Julian Scheer's book on outer space exploration from St. Martin's; Thad Stem's *The Perennial Almanac* from Heritage House; Elizabeth Coker's *La Belle*; and two books forthcoming by Manly Wade Wellman.

Other books expected included one on the family of Thomas Wolfe by LeGette Blythe, a novel by Guy Owen on the Cape Fear country, and the long-awaited sequel to *Jackson Mabaffey* by Fred Ross of Badin. Burke Davis, Lucy Daniels Inman, Ina Forbus, Ovid Pierce, Richard Walser, Doris Betts, Frank Borden Hanes, and Tom Wicker all had books in the works. 

1960 Biltmore Hotel, Morehead City

Ina Forbus, chair; Chalmers G. Davidson, vice-chair; Peggy Hoffmann, secretary.

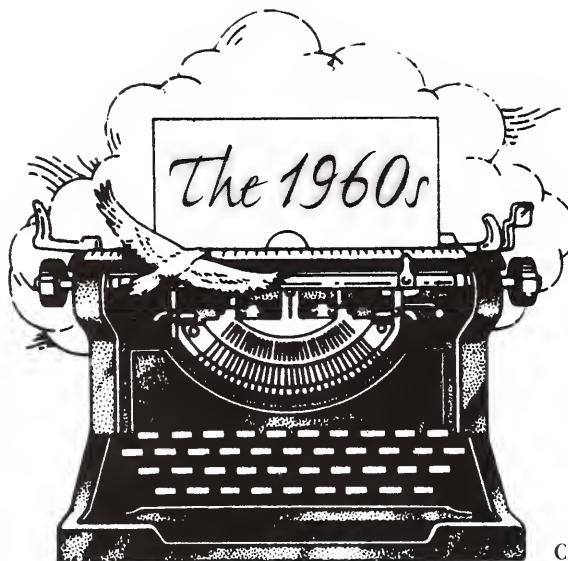
At Morehead City's Biltmore Hotel, the 1960 Conference reminisced. Chalmers Davidson presided over "A Decade of Impressions." The writers told the story of the ten conferences. They were Lambert Davis, LeGette Blythe, Richard Walser, Frank Borden Hanes, Bernice Kelly Harris, Wilma Dykeman Stokely, John Harden, Mebane Burgwyn, Bernadette Hoyle, and Fred Ross. The theme was nostalgia, and memories were in order, climaxed by an anniversary dinner.

"In the reminiscences and recollections of moments both profound and hilarious the name of the late James Street continually cropped up," Sam Ragan reported in "Southern Accent." "In those early years of the Conference it was Jimmie Street, more than anyone else, who gave the spark and fire to the gatherings. His comment on writing was always pointed and pungent, but he was always kind and gentle with young writers."

The program included sessions on "The Making of a Book," juvenile writing, and a final speech by Harry Shaw, New York editor. "Shaw... pointed to the increasing mergers of publishing houses," Ragan reported, "and predicted that in a few years their number will be reduced from some three hundred to perhaps thirty."

New faces included Agnew Bahnsen, Winston-Salem author, whose first novel had been published the previous year. Charles Mark, also of Winston-Salem, had a first novel forthcoming. Zoe Brockman of Gastonia had a second collection of poetry due out. Guy Owen, the Bladen native who then taught at Stetson and spent his summers at Moravian Falls, had his first novel, *Season of Fear*, on the bookshelves.

"...[F]or many of the writers that gathered at the Morehead Biltmore it was their first trip to that part of the State," Sam Ragan reported in "Southern Accent." "The different atmosphere of personal living between Eastern Carolina and their upland home towns was commented upon. As Fred Ross of Badin said, 'Even the frogs sounded different.'"



1961 Blowing Rock Library, Blowing Rock

Chalmers G. Davidson, chair;
Thad Stem, Jr. vice-chair; Julia

Montgomery Street, secretary.

At Blowing Rock in 1961 the Conference was entertained by Alice and Chalmers Davidson at a party at the Country Club. The next morning Tweetsie Railroad treated the members to a free ride.

The program included a panel on writing for young people and a discussion of "The World of Manners as Seen Through North Carolina Fiction" by Ovid Pierce, Jonathan Daniels, and LeGette Blythe. Richard Walser spoke on "The North Carolina Novel, Its History and Development." There were other talks such as a discussion of writing for young people by Ina Forbus, Nell Wise Wechter, and Thelma H. Bell, and on North Carolina as subject matter for historical fiction by Richard Walser.

In "Southern Accent," Sam Ragan noted, "Plans were made to publish an anthology of works by members of the Conference, and the group approved plans for a scholarship to be awarded to a young person of talent and ambition."

Among other items, Ragan reported Russell Brantley's first novel, *Come Dance with Me*, was due out from Mcmillan in the spring. Romulus Linney, a Western Carolina native who had taught at Carolina the past year, would have a first novel published by Atheneum the next year. He would return to work on the stage in New York in the fall. Jonathan Daniels's books on the Natchez Trace, the first in the American Trails Series, was due out in January. Frank Borden Hanes, whose *The Fleet Rabble* was published that June, was at work on another novel. 

1962

Plantation Inn, Raleigh

Thad Stem, chair; Sam Ragan, vice-chair; Richard Walser, director; Julia Montgomery Street, secretary.

The Plantation Inn, just north of Raleigh, proved such an ideal spot for the 1962 Conference that members decided to meet there in 1963 and 1964. The Conference would convene there six more times, in 1971, 1979, 1980, 1984, 1987 and 1997, making it by far the most popular meeting place for the group. Late, late night sessions—after the formal program—around the swimming pool became a tradition.

At one of the first meetings there, Betty Hodges recalled that she and Ed and their young children were asleep in their room when, about three a.m., there came a mighty pounding on the door. "Ed! It's Fred Chappell," the night visitor announced. "You got any liquor?" Ed got up and sent Fred away, while Betty allayed young fears over things that go bump in the night.

"Go back to sleep, children," she said. "It's just a poet."

Reporting on the 1962 meeting, Sam Ragan said: "Under the chairmanship and prodding of Thad Stem, Jr., the Conference heard more or less formal talks on the problems of today's writers...how to get criticized on the book pages and how to stand the criticism after you get it, and how to use one's own background as subject matter for works of fiction.

"Ben Haas," Ragan continued, "who bids fair to outdistance soon both Frank G. Slaughter and Manly Wade Wellman in number of books written, talked about his methods of writing original paperback novels. One part of his advice was the same as that of William Saroyan's in the famous preface to 'The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze'—learn to type fast. Haas has an average of better than fifty-five words per minute."

The Raleigh Conferences have been significant. For the first time, the governor of the state was a guest. Governor Terry Sanford addressed the 1963 dinner and expressed North Carolina's appreciation for its writers. Entertainment included a reception by Marjorie and Sam Ragan and Dety and Thad Stem; a buffet supper by Lucy and Jonathan Daniels; a coffee hour given by Elizabeth Hughey, former State Librarian; a tour of points of interest, including the Legislative Building and Central Prison Library; an exhibit of North Carolina books and writers' photographs at Olivia Raney Library and a coffee hour by Clyde Smith, the librarian.

New faces at the Raleigh Conferences included Fred Chappell (whose first novel was due out soon), Dorothy Koch, and Richard McKenna, who had become famous overnight with his novel, *The Sand Pebbles*.

James Street, Jr., New York literary agent, was a speaker and brought back a flood of memories of his father. Hiram Hayden, New York editor and publisher of many Tar Heel writers, was also a speaker. He was particularly excited over a first novel by Heather Ross Miller of Bladen County, due out that August. The writers also heard Dr. William Blackburn, Guy Owen, and Ovid Pierce discuss "The Teaching of Writing." They heard Paul Green and Bernice Kelly Harris discuss "The Drama." Harris stressed the importance of writing plays and producing them in community theaters just for the fun and experience of it, as had been done in her Northampton County town for years. 

1963

Plantation Inn, Raleigh

Sam Ragan, chair; Guy Owen, vice-chair; Charlotte Blount, secretary.

At the 1963 meeting, Conference members debated whether poets should be concerned with expressing and crystallizing the issues and events of the day—issues such as integration, the atomic bomb, automation, etc. "In the lively discussion that followed," Sam Ragan noted, "it was the general feeling that any attempt by a



Poet and novelist Fred Chappell, left, visits with his former Duke University writing teacher William Blackburn during the 1963 Conference. (Copyright 1963, Herald-Sun Company; reprinted by permission.)



Dety and Thad Stem, Jr., relax at Plantation Inn pool, just north of Raleigh, during the 1963 Conference. (Copyright 1963, Herald-Sun Company; reprinted by permission.)

Novelist Bernice Kelly Harris, left, and poet Zoe Kincaid Brockman, center; listen during the 1963 Conference as writer-photographer Bernadette Hoyle explains how she uses her camera to capture illustrations for her publications. (Copyright 1963, Herald-Sun Company; reprinted by permission.)



From left to right, Chalmers Davidson of Davidson College, Esther (Mrs. LeGette) Blythe of Huntersville, Walter Spearman of Chapel Hill, and Alice (Mrs. Chalmers) Davidson catch up on the news around the Plantation Inn pool at the 1963 Conference. (Copyright 1963, Herald-Sun Company; reprinted by permission.)

poet to write a timely and topical poem is doomed to failure. Still, even if the superficial subject matter of a poem may not be concerned with the day's issues, it is obvious that those issues are at the heart of many poems."

William Blackburn, Guy Owen, and Ovid Williams Pierce, sitting as a panel, discussed the teaching of writing. At best, they agreed, "it is an elusive task." Blackburn read a sketch recently written by one of his students at Duke, whose talent with the pen was immediately obvious. "I am proud to say," Blackburn reported, "that I had the good sense to tell him, 'Don't come to class any more. Just keep writing.'" ☘

1964

Plantation Inn, Raleigh

Guy Owen, chair; LeGette Blythe, vice-chair; Charlotte Blount, secretary.

Of the 1964 meeting at the Plantation Inn, Ragan said the Conference had grown "to more than fifty Tar Heel writers." John Foster West, a Western Carolina native then teaching at Old Dominion in Norfolk, read a chapter from his novel, *Time Was*, scheduled for publication by Random House that winter.

At a folklore session, Dr. Amos Abrams of Raleigh talked about ballads and played some of his own tape recordings of mountain natives he had tracked down to have them recall and record their songs. Bernice Kelly Harris and Manly Wade Wellman discussed folklore in general and its meaning and implications in writing. Among announcements at the 1964 NCWC was one by Charleen Whisnant of Charlotte that the inaugural hard cover issue of the *Red Clay Reader* was scheduled for publication that November. Poetry and prose from fourteen North Carolina writers was to be included in the first issue.

The Conference member who admitted he was more on the spot than anyone else was Ben Haas of Raleigh. The reviews on his *Look Away, Look Away* were coming out while he was in attendance. The reviews, including one in the *New York Times*, were good, and the novel had already been made a Literary Guild selection.

Russell Brantley expected to finish work on his second novel, much longer and more ambitious than *The Education of Jonathan Beam*, before the summer ended. As the Conference ended, Hiram Hayden said that eighty percent of the best fiction was coming from the South those days, and it was beginning to look like most of that was coming from North Carolina. ☘

1965

Heart of Charlotte Motel, Charlotte

LeGette Blythe, chair; John Fries Blair, vice-chair; Betty Hodges, secretary.

Gerald Johnson, editorial executive of the *Baltimore Sun* and a noted author, was on the program and was especially pleased with the large number of producing writers in the state, pointing out that when he left his journalism teaching job at Chapel Hill in the mid-1920s for the joy of editorial writing on the *Baltimore Sun*, there were few writers in North Carolina. You could count them on one hand and maybe have some fingers left over, he said.

"There were upwards of a hundred writers who heard him talk on the opening night of the annual meeting of the North Carolina Writers Conference," Sam Ragan reported. "Johnson said afterwards, 'Every publishing house in America should have had a representative here.'"

Sam Ragan moderated a panel composed of Leon Cooke, John Foster West, Kathy Noyes, and Fred Chappell. A second panel chaired by Guy Owen focused on North Carolina markets and included Charleen Whisnant, Tolson Willis, Tom Watkins, and Ed Goodsey. In the course of discussion that followed it was bought out that novels completed and expected to be published in the coming months included *A Forest of Feathers* by Peggy Hoffmann of Raleigh, *The Far Family* by Wilma Dykeman, *The Family* by Elizabeth Boatwright Coker, and books by Dot Barnwell of Burlington, Heather Ross Miller of Singletary Lake, and LeGette Blythe of Huntersville. Others at work on novels included John Ehle, Harriet Doar of Charlotte, Susan Jeffries and Guy Owen of Raleigh.

Frank Jay, New York publisher, was the banquet speaker. Panel sessions were held at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Conference members donated copies of their books to a special North Carolina section planned for the UNCC library. A boat trip on the side-wheeler *Robert E. Lee*, square dancing, and a Sunday morning brunch hosted by Harry Golden added spice to the weekend. ☘

1966

Sheraton Motor Inn, Winston-Salem

John Fries Blair, chair; Bernadette Hoyle, vice-chair; Betty Hodges, secretary.

The members were honored guests at the outdoor drama, *Till the Day Break*, on Friday evening. The next evening John Fries Blair and Frank Borden Hanes were hosts at a cocktail party and dinner. Four book reviewers—Harriet Doar of Charlotte, Charlotte Blount of Winston-Salem, Zoe Kincaid Brockman of Gastonia, and Betty Hodges of Durham—gave their views on book reviewing.

Three Tar Heel professors gave a learned survey of the contemporary literary scene—Dr. Elizabeth Phillips, Wake Forest College; Dr. Harry K. Russell, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and Dr. Lodwick Hartley, North Carolina State University. The last session was a discussion of the decline of fiction by Harold Hayes, editor of *Esquire*, and Paxton Davis, the author of several novels, who was a former Winston-Salem newspaperman then teaching journalism at Washington and Lee University.

"Willie Snow Ethridge, who has appeared as a speaker before literary groups all over the country, says she has never heard of anything else like [the NCWC] anywhere else in the country," Ragan reported in "Southern Accent." "Glenn Tucker says he used to think Indiana had a lot of writers, but that it doesn't come close in number to North Carolina."

More than sixty writers attended the 1966 Conference. In surveying the state's literary scene, Ragan listed among the up and coming Tar Heel writers: Reynolds Price of Durham, Fred Chappell of Greensboro, Heather Ross Miller of Singletary Lake, Lucy Daniels Inman and Peggy Hoffmann of Raleigh, Sylvia Wilkinson and Camilla Bittle of Durham, and, "although she has been publishing fiction for a dozen years," Doris Betts of Sanford.

"I know of at least ten writers in Raleigh who have completed or are nearing completion of novels," Ragan reported, noting elsewhere that: "Guy Owen has finished a sequel to *The Ballad of the Flim-Flam Man*, which has been sold to the movies. Glenn Tucker, whose last book was a biography of Zeb Vance, is at work on a book about Gettysburg and another on the naval story of the War of 1812. Thad Stem, Jr., whose *Spur Line* is receiving much praise, is at work on another

book." Other writers with books in the works included Richard Walser, LeGette Blythe, Nell Wise Wechter, John Ehle, Kathy Noyes, and Leon Rooke.

All of this writing activity, Ragan observed, heralded a day far different from that when South Carolina's J. Gordon Coogler offered his lament:

*Alas for the South,
Her books have grown fewer,
She never was much given
To literature.* 

1967

Whispering Pines Lodge, Southern Pines

Bernadette Hoyle, chair; Walter Spearman, vice-chair; Hal A. Sieber, secretary.

In 1967 the Conference met for the first time in Southern Pines, and Bernadette Hoyle speculated that it "may conceivably be the stable organization it is simply because it is not hampered by rules and formality, but is held together by the bonds of friendship." Harry Golden once remarked that "not only do North Carolina writers not hate each other, but we are all devoted friends."

In his "Southern Accent" column, Sam Ragan reported that a lively discussion was moderated by Hal Sieber of Greensboro on the writer and his responsibility. On the panel were Thad Stem, Jr., Harry Golden, Dot Barnwell, and Camilla Bittle. "Some recent trends in writing, in which fact is treated as fiction and fiction as fact, came in for analysis. Novelist Bittle conceded that much of today's non-fiction is being presented quite imaginatively, and that the fiction writer is faced by demands that they write what the publishers think the public wants to read."

Harry Golden saw nothing wrong with the writer trying to attract readers to his views, and as for the writer and his responsibility, he cited the race issue as one calling for the writer's concern. No man, including the writer, he felt, was separate from his times. "Maybe the novel can contain a little teaching," observed Mrs. Barnwell, who had published two novels, "if it doesn't appear to be teaching."

A current best-seller, the novel which many claimed was thinly veiled fact—*The Valley of the Dolls*—was brought into the discussion. What moral, what message did it teach? Hal Seiber observed that, "It does teach a young man that there's a lot one can get at a drugstore."



LINDA B. WALTERS

John Fries Blair

Jonathan Yardley, book editor of the *Greensboro Daily News* (and later for the *Washington Post*), and Charleen Whisnant, editor of the *Red Clay Reader*, were among those who thought the novel was losing ground. It was Bernadette Hoyle who recalled the comment of the late James Street at an earlier Conference when the same subject was being debated: "There is nothing wrong with fiction that a good book can't cure."

Among other special events at the 1967 Conference was a visit to the James Boyd Room at the Southern Pines Library and a talk by Richard Walser and others about the author's life and work. Katharine Boyd held a reception for the group at Weymouth, and the guests included the two daughters of author Laurence Stallings, both book critics and writers themselves.

Robert Brickell, director of the North Carolina Arts Council, told the group of plans to give financial aid to literary publications that provide a place for the work of young writers. The final formal program consisted of a talk by John Wiley, editor-in-chief of William Morrow Company.

Each Conference member was presented a booklet by Bernadette Hoyle that gave an informal history of the organization. In his introduction, Hal Sieber wrote that the NCWC was "probably more formal and more durable than a round-robin letter or a street-corner crowd. It is probably less self-conscious and less formal than such institutions as the Republican Party or the line at the ABC store."

By 1967 the group had lost by death some of its most valued members—James Street, William T. Polk, Sam Byrd, Noel Houston, Margarette Smethurst, John Fletcher, Richard McKenna, and Agnew Bahnsen.

Richard Walser, named permanent director at the New Bern Conference, consulted each year with the chairman, vice-chair, and secretary-treasurer about plans for the meeting. "And, so far as anyone knows," Ragan observed, "no other state has an organization quite like the North Carolina Writers Conference." ☐

1968

Velvet Cloak Inn, Raleigh

Walter Spearman, chair; Manly Wade Wellman, vice-chair; Harriet Doar, secretary.

A Southern writer with a Southern subject and a Southern scene may step up to the plate with one strike against him when he sends his manuscript off to a Northern publisher. That seemed to be the opinion of several writers who discussed this and other subjects at the 1968 Conference at the Velvet Cloak.

"Manly Wade Wellman is certain that there is an anti-South bias among Northern editors and publishers at the present time," Sam Ragan reported in "Southern Accent." "Others, agreeing, were of the opinion, however, that it is merely a phase through which the publishers are passing."

The lively discussion came during the first session when a panel of "young" writers—Sally Buckner and Cam Reeves of Raleigh, Velverton Land of Chapel Hill and Fred Daugherty of Durham—posed questions for the older writers to answer. The session also brought out caustic comment on the current crop of "no novels," with someone inquiring if "plot" is a dirty word.

An afternoon session found young novelists Reynolds Price, Heather Ross Miller, and Sylvia Wilkinson dealing with the question posed by moderator Wallace Kaufman as to whether writers should be activists in causes and deal in so-called "hot topics" such as Norman Mailer had been doing in recent books.

It was Price who gave the most eloquent and articulate defense of the novelist as a non-activist in current causes. The novel, he said, is a conservative form because it is based on the past. Novels about the present have a rootless quality. The novelist is a secret agent, because if he is to make the novel a mirror in the roadway, he must be able to move freely among people involved in the human experience. "I write about love and hate," he said, "the hottest topics of this or any time." Some writers present, such as Harry Golden, insisted, however, that all writers should lend their talents to curing society's ills.

Conference participants included Ben Haas, Frances Gray Patton of Durham, and Charles Wright of Chapel Hill, whose book of poems, *Early Rising*, was to be published that October. Wright read three poems from the book. He described his writing habits as turning out "one beer or two beer poems."

Haas told of the many themes he had used in writing a variety of paperback books under a number of pen-names. He refused to reveal any of the pen-names he used, but few writers could match him in the variety of subject matter—westerns, sex, suspense, medical, etc. Mrs. Patton told a charming story of her first venture into writing—a seven-act play given in the backyard of her home in Raleigh during World War I to benefit the Red Cross. Of her short stories, which brought her fame, she said, "I wrote short stories as one-act plays," meaning that she visualized the events of a story as they would be seen on a stage.



Sam Ragan and Sally Buckner

MAE WOODS BELL

John Ehle, down from Winston-Salem with his wife Rosemary, said he was halfway through a new novel. Richard Walser was working on a history of North Carolina literature, and Walter Spearman was writing a history of the Carolina Playmakers. Peggy Hoffmann of Raleigh had a book of folk tales scheduled for a fall release and a novel centering around the War of 1812 coming up the next year.

Dr. Eugene Grace of Chapel Hill talked about the new publishing house he had established, Moore Publishing, with two books scheduled for publication, Joyce Crawford's *Stranger in Our Darkness* and an anthology of *Nine Negro Poets* by Robert Shuman of Duke University. Bill Loftin, publisher of *A Flagstone Walk* by Thad Stem, Jr., reported good advance sales for the collection of short stories by the Oxford author. The most fascinating title of forthcoming books was by Leon Rooke of Chapel Hill. His collection of short stories, to be published by Louisiana State University Press, was called *Last One Home Sleeps in the Yellow Bed*. 

1969 Albert Pick Motel, Greensboro

**Manly Wade Wellman, chair; John Foster West, vice-chair;
Mena F. Webb, secretary.**



LINDA B. WALTERS

Marjorie and Sam Ragan

Upwards of one hundred writers attended the Greensboro Conference, a high spot of which was a learned discussion on the state of the novel by Ovid Pierce of East Carolina University, who was the winner a few weeks earlier of the North Carolina Award for his contributions to literature.

The following account comes from Sam Ragan's "Southern Accent," which was now appearing in *The Pilot*, a weekly newspaper in Southern Pines with a circulation of about 3,000 that he

and Marjorie had bought from Katharine Boyd, the widow of novelist James Boyd. Under the Ragans, it would become arguably the liveliest and most literate weekly paper anywhere, and its circulation would soar to over 16,000, as many writers around the state became regular subscribers.

Pierce examined the novel from a historical perspective and compared contemporary products, such as *Portnoy's Complaint*, with the novels of Thomas Hardy, Edith Wharton, and others. "The repudiation of the past, in whatever areas of experience, is taken almost as a point of departure in critical approach," Pierce said. "This is true in morality, in education, in the military, the arts, and in society. Once more in our history civil disobedience has become our higher law."

He went on to say that for many of that day's writers the world was too big and too much for them to tackle as writers of the past had sought to do. What they sought instead, he said, was "fragmentation, a retreat from the vast canvases of the early novelists, and a retreat from any firm moral judgment."

One of the liveliest sessions was that conducted by Jonathan Yardley of the *Greensboro Daily News*, with Fred Chappell, James Applewhite, Henry Sedgewick, and William Newnam, all associated with the writing program at the University in Greensboro. All reckoned Greensboro an unlikely place for a literary renaissance, Chappell saying it was the "most philistine of cities," and Applewhite paraphrasing an old saying that "Greensboro is a nice place to live but no one would want to visit there." Yet, writing was flourishing there, and the program at UNC-G was attracting young writers from all over the country—from California, Washington, Wyoming, Iowa. Chappell said that maybe it provided something to rub against, and later when asked what writers wrote about, he said, "Every writer rubs against his childhood."

The witty and learned Dr. Hugh Holman of Chapel Hill led a panel on non-fiction as a creative art, with Alice Wellman Harris of California and Glenn Tucker as the other speakers. Tucker, who lived at Flat Rock, was a wonderful storyteller.

He told one about Bernard Baruch, who years ago used to catch the train to New York from Georgetown, S.C., and a coachman would drive him to the station. One morning he discovered that he had forgotten his necktie and told the coachman to stop at a haberdashery. The coachman looked a little perplexed but started off in a gallop, headed away from town. Baruch stopped him and reminded him that he wanted to go to a haberdashery. The driver reined in the horses, turned to Mr. Baruch and said, "Let's get things settled. What is it you want—liquor or women?" 

1970 Holiday Inn, Boone

John Foster West, chair; Peggy Hoffmann, vice-chair; Helen Copeland, secretary.

"It was with nostalgia and some sadness that I read Sam Ragan's column on the 1970 Writers Conference in Boone, when I was chair," John Foster West admitted in the spring of 1999. "Of the North Carolina writers mentioned in the article, the following are now deceased: Sam Ragan, Guy Owen, Manly Wade Wellman, Tom Walters, Thad Stem, Harry Golden, Paul Green, Jonathan Daniels, and Bernice Kelly Harris.

"There may be other names I am not aware of; after all, I was an ambitious fifty-two at that time, just completing my first year teaching at Appalachian State University. Now I am an ancient eighty with mostly memories to sustain me."

At the Conference, perhaps reflecting the mood of social change and activism that continued to sweep the country, poet James Applewhite appealed to his fellow writers to lend their talents to arousing the people of this state and nation to the pollution crisis. Manly Wade Wellman expressed doubt as to how influential writers might be. He told of the time a woman accosted the bearded Ernest Hemingway, thinking he was Burl Ives. She had never heard of Hemingway—and Wellman's point was that even famous writers were far behind in influence when compared with television personalities.

One particular memory of that weekend comes to West's mind. "I was driving down the steep, winding road off the top of Beech Mountain the way mountain natives drive when James Applewhite, who was in the rear seat of my Wagoneer with his wife, reached across and tapped me on the shoulder. 'John,' he said, 'my wife is expecting. Would you please slow down?' I did, and saved 'what he was expecting,' his unborn son, who is now twenty-nine years old."

One other event stands out. A man in his thirties, who was also a guest at the Holiday Inn, was attending a horse show at Blowing Rock. On Saturday evening he was quite intoxicated. "He was 'coming onto' our young women with a fervor," West recalled.



When none of them responded, the fellow returned to his room, donned his bathing suit, and came back out, to do belly-flops into the pool, splashing it over the writers assembled nearby.

"A local musician, there to play dulcimer for us, offered to punch him in the nose for me," West said. "I

thanked him and told him I had a better idea. I got the 'gentleman's' name and address from someone I knew working at the Inn and wrote his wife a letter advising her to keep him on a leash on weekends because he was too immature to be away from home unsupervised. I never heard the result of my letter, but I doubt he ever attended another horse show alone."

1971 Plantation Inn, Raleigh

Peggy Hoffmann, chair; Thomas N. Walters, vice-chair; Mae Woods Bell, secretary.

What makes a best-seller? Hilda Lindley confessed to the North Carolina Writers Conference that even after twenty-five years in the publishing business in editing, promotion, and publicity, she still didn't know. The articulate director of promotion and publicity for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich said that, of course, what's in a book was most important. But she cited elaborate promotion programs for some good books that failed, as well as some that succeeded.

Among those at the Conference with new books on the horizon was Ben Haas of Raleigh, whose *The Chandler Heritage* was to be published in January. "It is a long, fat book with a background in the textile industry," Sam Ragan reported, "a work on which he has been laboring for several years."

Bertha Harris, the Fayetteville native then teaching at UNC-Charlotte, was expecting her second novel, *Confessions of Cherubino*, out soon. Doris Betts's *The River to Pickle Beach* was due out by Harper, and John Ehle's *The Journey of August King* was also to be published that fall. Fred Chappell's fourth novel was



Guy Owen

titled *The Gaudy Place*, and his first collection of poems was being published by the Louisiana State University Press. Jonathan Williams also had a new book of poems coming out. Others with new books in the works included Thad Stem, Jr., Willie Snow Ethridge, Guy Owen, Glen Rounds, Tom Walters, Campbell Reeves, and Robert Watson.

One of the founding members of the Conference, Bernice Kelly Harris, was in attendance for the first time in several years and received a

standing ovation following a tribute to her by Thad Stem. At the opening of the meeting on Friday, Dr. Robert Ward, president of the North Carolina School of the Arts, told of the work at the school with students in music, dance, drama, painting and sculpting, and in writing. He pointed to the dearth of good movie scripts and of the poor movies being produced. Most of the scripts, he said, consisted only of a little mumbling, a few grunts and then the bed.

Along those lines, Charles Blackburn, Jr., offered the following footnote to the 1971 Conference.

My first brush with the crowd was a memorable one. I had just turned twenty, and Thad Stem got me included in on an after hours, tangential poetry reading that Tex Wood, then editor of the Above Ground Review, had organized at My Apartment topless lounge on Hillsborough Street in Raleigh. Thad and I took one look at the set-up and, without any consultation, concluded that with so much poetry in motion, anything we had to say was utterly superfluous.

However, as I recall, Tex and Joel Jackson both read a couple of poems during an intermission. Joel died of cancer not many years later at the age of thirty-five. A copy of his posthumous collection, News, Weather & Sports, is on my bookshelf, and I can still see him in the glow of the Schlitz and Budweiser lights, shouting out a poem behind the safety of the bar. A line in it about a woman's wearing a church key on a string like a crucifix between her breasts drew the most enthusiastic response I've ever witnessed at a poetry reading. 

1972 Holiday Inn, Wilmington

Bynum Shaw, chair; Ronald H. Bayes, vice-chair; Mae Woods Bell, secretary.

"I've never been quite sure why I was asked to chair the 1972 Writers Conference," Bynum Shaw confessed. "I think the 1971 people had run out of names and remembered that my novel, *The Nazi Hunter*, had won the Sir Walter Raleigh Award a few years earlier. I know nobody elected me."

He went on to say: "I tried to have a surprise guest. I asked Scott Meredith, then one of New York's top literary agents, to come down, and because I had made some money for him, he agreed. But at the last minute he canceled, and I had to draft some of our fellow members."

About fifty members and their spouses attended. "Helen Tucker Beckwith, who had written more paperback romances than anybody else, along with some very good hard-cover stuff, talked about writing," Shaw recalled. "Manly Wade Wellman, who would write anything for a few bucks, talked about making a few bucks, and Charleen Whisnant was her usual ebullient self. Can't remember what she talked about, maybe her magazine, but we all got ebullient. Claude Howell was on the program, and Glen Rounds did a fascinating presentation about illustrations, complete with chalk art and a lively commentary."

Ron Bayes was elected the new chair, with Southern Pines the next destination. "Perhaps the highlight came after we had adjourned," Shaw observed, "when everyone took to the waters at Wrightsville Beach." 

1973 Pine Needles Lodge Southern Pines

Ronald H. Bayes, chair; Mae Woods Bell, vice-chair; Eva McKenna, secretary.

Writing in the *Durham Morning Herald*, Betty Hodges said, "The 1973 version of the annual North Carolina Writers Conference, held at the posh Pine Needles Lodge and Country Club in the sandhills of Southern Pines, was different somehow, with its emphasis on the up-and-comers rather than the old, established names, but it had all the vigor, all the fire of the old days."

Newcomers included Ronnie Carey of Raleigh, who had a first volume of folk tales coming out soon, and Steve Hoffius of Durham, whose *Carologue* the year before had been a popular

addition to a host of environmentalist publications that had set sales records all over the country. Atheneum editor Michael Besse brought word on the publishing situation in New York, and Frances Bavier, television's Aunt Bee on *The Andy Griffith Show*, compared the art of writing with the art of acting.

Red Clay Books publisher Charleen Whisnant told how she used proceeds from her company's fantastically successful birth control manual, *The Loving Book*, to finance a series of poetry collections by Tar Heel authors. John F. Blair explained why his spring list was blank (urban renewal had overtaken his Winston-Salem building); and Dr. Eugene Grace of Moore Publishing had a number of authors stand whose work he'd published recently, including Thad Stem, Jr., Cherry Parker, John Foster West, Joyce Proctor Beaman, and Cam Reeves.

Rod Cockshutt of Raleigh, Harriet Doar of Charlotte, and Betty Hodges and Judy Hogan of Durham talked about book reviewing and the continuing difficulty of choosing from among too many books and maintaining the required critical stance when dealing with regional authors.

Before the formal program ended, the group paused to honor one of its most active and popular members, Sam Ragan, with the creation of the Sam Ragan Poetry Prize, to be awarded annually by the literary magazine *Crucible*, published at the honoree's alma mater, Atlantic Christian College (now Barton College).

One of the final acts of the meeting was the compilation of a memory note with signatures for Bernice Kelly Harris, who was recovering from a stroke but still confined to her room in a Durham rest home. Harris sent a lengthy note of thanks to Sam Ragan, which he talked about in his column a month later, only a few days after her death.

"She was, without question," Ragan said, "North Carolina's best loved writer. And she loved writers. For many years she had taught creative writing in her Writers Workshop at Chowan College. Her students—young and old—came from many miles to sit with her and learn the wonders of the craft of writing. Among our most pleasant memories are visits to her 'commencements'—held each year in the form of an outdoor picnic in one of the towns of the Roanoke-Chowan region. On one of our last 'commencements' we drove down with Thad and Dety Stem and sat in the backyard of a Weldon home and listened to that gracious lady encourage her students to talk about themselves and their writing."



LINDA B. WALTERS

Marion Cannon and Charleen Whisnant

1974

University Motor Inn, Chapel Hill

Mae Woods Bell, chair; Glen Rounds, vice-chair; Eva McKenna, secretary.

"Noel Houston once told me," Sam Ragan reported, "that when he gathered with writers and listened to talk which went on into the night, he was enthralled. 'I expected the truth, the ultimate truth, to flower any minute,' he said. But, he added, 'As I grew older, I discovered that if the truth didn't flower by midnight, it wasn't going to flower—so you might as well go to bed and start over again the next night.'

John Harden recalled at the 1974 Conference that Houston, the late novelist of Chapel Hill, was always the last to quit. It was the twenty-fifth meeting of the Writers Conference and several of those who were at the first gathering on Roanoke Island in 1950 were there to recall the beginnings. Bernadette Hoyle presided over a panel session at which Harden, Chalmers Davidson, Richard Walser, Thad Stem, Jr., and James Street, Jr., talked about some of the early meetings.

Because it was the twenty-fifth meeting, the chair, Mae Woods Bell of Rocky Mount, had arranged a program of nostalgia, recollections, and talks by some of the veteran members—writing stars such as Paul Green and Ovid Pierce. She recently said she had planned to have them hold forth from rocking chairs, but the Inn couldn't come up with enough to accommodate all the participants.

Pierce, whose fourth novel, *The Wedding Guest*, had been published a few weeks earlier, talked about the changes that had come in the South and the country as a whole. Mobility—or "auto-mobility"—had created a "rootless society," he said. The old sense of place, so strong in Southern writing, had disappeared or was disappearing—and Pierce wondered if anything had come along to take its place. "People need to belong," he said. "They need the sense of belonging to something." He felt that the lost sense of place might be replaced by something such as a sense of place in the mind, in the spirit, in the heart—but he was not sure that it had as yet taken place.

"The carefully thought out talk," Ragan reported, "will be published in its entirety in next spring's issue of the *St. Andrews*



LINDA B. WALTERS

Peggy Hoffmann and Bernadette Hoyle

Review, the editors of that magazine, Ron Bayes and Malcolm Doubles, being quick to see its literary importance and arranging with Pierce on the spot for its publication."

The capstone of the Conference was the final evening's talk by Paul Green, the famed playwright, whom Richard Walser called "the daddy of us all." Writing had come a long way in North Carolina, Green said. He recalled that when he first went to the University at Chapel Hill in 1915, he had never seen a man who had written a book, and, in fact, there was only one man in Chapel Hill who had written one. He was pointed out to newcomers and visitors as a curiosity—a man who had written a book. It was Archibald Henderson.

Great wit and humor flowed through Green's talk. He recalled his years in Hollywood, where he wrote for such stars as Will Rogers, the well-known *State Fair* being among his scripts. George Arliss was another for whom he wrote. There were several encounters with the legendary Sam Goldwyn. Green compared the problems of dealing with certain subject matter in a realistic way in those days with the openness of contemporary movies.

He wound up his talk by going back to his favorite theme—man's dreams and the lifelong struggle to achieve those dreams, the necessity for believing in "the dream," the perfectibility of man. "Whenever Paul Green is caught up in this theme his talk becomes pure poetry," Ragan observed in his literary column, "and this occasion was no exception. This is a man who has lived this century through, who has seen much, felt much, and who has been in the vanguard of the search for a better way of life. Paul Green has been a yea-sayer all of his life, and he still greets each day with bright-eyed wonder and a belief in 'the dream.'" ☐

1975 Holiday Inn, Laurinburg

**Thomas N. Walters, chair;
Eugene Grace, vice-chair;
Ann Deagon, secretary.**

Twenty years earlier, John Fries Blair had seen a need and decided to fill it—and the observance of his twentieth year in book publishing was one of the high spots of the 1975 Writers Conference. The Winston-Salem publisher heard trib-



Left to right, seated, Mae Woods Bell and Shelby Stephenson, and standing, unidentified guest, Grace Gibson, and Ron Bayes

utes from the more than seventy-five writers assembled, many of whom he had published.

There was a session on the teaching of creative writing, with writer-teachers Guy Owen, Heather Ross Miller, and Linda Grimsley discussing their approaches to such efforts. There was emphasis on creating a climate in which writers can thrive, and there was also talk on the "writing block" that all writers at one time or another face. The story was recalled of how Sinclair Lewis once said that the reason his first wife divorced him was she never could understand that he was working when he sat staring out of a window.

There was a talk on poetry, or rather on the publishing of poetry. Taking part were Ann Deagon, who was scheduled to have her fourth book out in a little more than a year; Betty Adcock, whose first collection was to be published that fall by the Louisiana State University Press; and Marion Cannon, whose first book of poetry had sold well since coming out the year before.

Sam Ragan reported that the highlight of the Conference was the final banquet session in which Walter and Jean Spearman of Chapel Hill related the history of the Writers Conference in story and song, Walter recalling some memorable events and people and Jean with songs pertinent to the theme of the narration.

Among other writers present were Willie Snow Ethridge of Rocky River, Mena Webb of Durham, Elizabeth Boatwright Coker, Charlotte Hilton Green, Harriet Doar of Charlotte, and Betty Hodges of Durham. The witty Mrs. Ethridge was fascinated by the fact that Mae Woods Bell was killing flies to feed to a spider that was building an ornate web from the second story of the motel to a radio aerial of a parked car. ☐



LINDA B. WALTERS

Elizabeth Boatwright Coker

1976 Governor's Inn Research Triangle Park

Eugene Grace, chair; Ann Deagon, vice-chair; Heather Ross Miller, secretary.

"Writers may write more as an act of compulsion than as an act of will, satisfying an inner urge and first themselves, but they also write to be read," Sam Ragan reflected in his column. "Few of

them are content to waste their sweetness on the desert air, and art for art's sake is not a compelling dogma with writers. They want to be published, to see their work in print."

Thus, he reported, there was considerable interest in book publishing discussions that marked the annual gathering of the Writers Conference. More than a hundred writers came for the informal sessions, which featured talks on university presses by Sandra Eisdorfer of the University of North Carolina Press and Ted Saros of Duke University Press, a talk by Blyden Jackson of the UNC Department of English on black writing, a panel moderated by UNC historian William Powell on the research and writing of history, and a poetry reading in which more than a dozen poets participated.

Among the book displays, St. Andrews College Press had five new books out and received many compliments for the quality of their work. One of them was *WRYmes* by Mae Woods Bell of Rocky Mount, billed as "a light-hearted look at heavy-handed reality." This collection included more than a hundred of her humorous, pungent four-line commentaries that had become familiar to readers of the *Southern Pines Pilot*. These pithy quatrains were a regular hallmark at the end of Sam Ragan's popular "Southern Accent" column, which ran prominently on the editorial page of the paper, in itself an indication of how important he thought literature was.

Bea Keiser, author of the new book *Hearts Are Trumps* was among the speakers. Guy Owen moderated the poetry session. In a moving tribute to the young poet Amon Liner, who had died only a few days earlier, Owen read one of Liner's poems that carried the prophetic line "from where I write at the end of the world." Guy also announced that a new anthology of North Carolina poetry was to be published soon by John F. Blair of Winston-Salem.

Charleen Whisnant of Red Clay Books in Charlotte distributed purple handbills announcing the forthcoming publication of *New Love Stories by Women*. Among others in attendance were novelist John Ehle and his wife, actress Rosemary Harris; poet Maria Ingram; Roy Wilder, who had a new edition of *You All Spoken Here* coming out soon; Norman Macleod, editor of *Pembroke Magazine*; Julie Suk, who also had a forthcoming book of poetry; John Foster West; Helen Copeland; Campbell Reeves; and Carol Wilkinson, who had been getting a lot of attention for her *North Carolina Review* magazine and North Carolina Review Press. 

1977 Holiday Inn, Asheboro

Ann Deagon, chair; Heather Ross Miller, vice-chair; Victor Dalmas, secretary.

"How come I can't recollect what went on that year?" asked Ann Deagon. "Too much time in the sun—or in the hospitality room? Was that the year Paul Green (already in his mid-80s) advised me to junk the play I'd written about a couple just turned 80, since it was the young ones people wanted to hear about? But no, I didn't write that play till 1981. Did a trio of old-timers, reliving the early skinny-dipping days, have to be hauled out of the motel pool by assorted wives and colleagues at 2 a.m.? Could have happened—any year—but who's to say?"

She said Sam Ragan reported what was fit to print: Guy Owen's talk on Southern storytelling; Helen Copeland at the beginning of film-making in the state; the banquet honoring Paul Green, with Thad Stem, Walter Spearman, Manly Wade Wellman, and Terry Sanford paying tribute; and Betty Adcock, Tom Huey, Rob Smith, and Deagon reading poems.

In his column, Ragan noted that one of the main reasons poetry had flourished so in North Carolina over the past twenty-five years could be attributed to support given by the North Carolina Arts Council to the thirty or forty "little magazines" in the state, where "poets have found a way to give voice to their work."

A number of young poets gathered around the swimming pool at the Holiday Inn and talked about poetry and publishing. Some read from works in progress, asking for comments and criticism. Which prompted one person to recall the story about Joseph Conrad, who was grumbling one morning at breakfast about reviews of his latest book. "Why, Joseph," his wife asked, "don't you like criticism?" And Conrad's reply was, "Criticism, hell; I want praise."

"You have to understand," Deagon said, "what really happens at the North Carolina Writers Conference is a lot more than what's on the program. (Note the absence of the apostrophe; the Conference doesn't *belong* to the writers, it is the writers.) And the time span it covers is a lot more than three days at the end of July.

"When I came to my first Conference—tagging along with Hal Sieber, since my books weren't out yet—I found myself in some sort of time warp," Deagon recalled. "I couldn't even tell which writers were dead or alive, the bonds of shared living, writing (and



LINDA B. WALTERS

Ann Deagon



In 1977, the Conference began a tradition of honoring the life and work of one of its own at the Saturday evening banquet. The obvious choice as first recipient was Paul Green, Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatist, philosopher, social activist and, above all, humanitarian. Green is pictured here with his wife, Elizabeth Lay Green, during the 1981 meeting of the Thomas Wolfe Society at Chapel Hill. Green and Wolfe were members of the same fraternity at the University. (N.C. Collection, UNC-Chapel Hill Lib.)

carousing) were so powerful. Ask yourself, will there ever be a Conference where Sam Ragan is not among us?

"And like a bluegrass festival, where the best picking is not on the stage but in the campground and parking lot," she said, "the pulse of the Conference beats most strongly in the various holes and corners where old friends—and new—come together to open up their manuscripts and their hearts."

In honoring Paul Green at its Saturday night banquet that year, the Conference, for the first time, collectively paid tribute to one of its members, one of its founders. Sam Ragan presided. He reminded the audience that they were meeting near the geographic center of the state and saw a special significance in that fact—"I know of no one else who has been more at the center of North Carolina's hopes and dreams than Paul Green." Thad Stem, Jr., thanked Green for having "been our spiritual inspiration and benefactor for a long time." Stem continued, "In Paul's case, the spiritually homeless he gives hope to, and direction every time he raises his pen." Manly Wade Wellman spoke next, followed by Walter Spearman, both praising their longtime friend for his literary achievements but also for his contributions to social and racial justice.

Former governor Terry Sanford, then president of Duke University, took the speaker's stand. He expressed his personal appreciation for Green's leadership on so many public issues and added, "It's great for a state to have such a man, such a poet among its people because that's the kind of vision a state, a civilization, a society must have if it's to triumph, if it's to succeed as a civilization."

Green's wife, Elizabeth Lay Green, read a formal resolution from the Conference, expressing its appreciation for Paul's many contributions to North Carolina and the world of letters. The honoree then rose, thanking his friends and sharing his optimism that with the new technological advances Man has created that "we have the chance, the first chance to build in this world a garden, what I call it, a garden of Eden." But he warned that people,

especially the young, need to feel needed, to feel they are contributing something worthwhile to the world. With technology eliminating the necessity for many types of physical labor—and, consequently, the psychological satisfaction that comes from completing physical tasks—people, especially the young, need to discover a sense of accomplishment in other areas, Green argued. He saw, however, an opportunity in the beauty, the creativity found in the arts, concluding

So tonight I declare that the time and hour of the artists has arrived. That all of us going out of here can champion that, can be disciples of, preachers for this new age of beautification of this world. Ugliness can be made to disappear. The young people can be inspired to step forward to help make a world they love and appreciate and they can feel proud of. 

1978

Sheraton Motor Inn, Southern Pines

Victor Dalmas, chair; Shelby Stephenson, vice-chair; Sallie Nixon, secretary.

Meeting at Weymouth gave an extra dimension to the 1978 Conference. Several members felt there was a special aura about the place where James Boyd had written his novels and poetry and which had been visited by many distinguished writers: Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, Paul Green and others. Plans for establishing the Weymouth Center for the Arts and Humanities were discussed, with a writers residency program being part of those plans.

Ann Deagon lead a panel discussion on poetry, and Guy Owen, on fiction. Two African-American poets, Gerald Barrax and



LINDA B. WALTERS

Gerald Barrax

Guy Owen reported that he had just read a batch of stories in preparation for a one-week course he was conducting at Indiana University, and "there was not a single one of them which would identify the writer with Indiana." Paul Green talked about earlier years at Weymouth when he had joined in talks about writing and writers with Boyd and others.

Ruth Moose, who had recently sold a short story to *Atlantic Monthly*, joined Owen in declaring that there was a new interest in the short story. Manly Wade Wellman, one of the old pros in writing with some seventy books to his credit, talked about some of his earlier experiences as a writer, and the advice he gave young writers in his classes.

The Conference ended with a tribute to Jonathan and Lucy Daniels. Speakers included Frances Gray Patton, Walter Spearman, and Thad Stem, who had sent a taped tribute because he was unable to attend. In his statement, Stem recalled the more than

twenty books Daniels had written, noting their importance in North Carolina, Southern and American literature, and lauded Daniels for his mastery of language and the compassion he showed in his work. Green had written a poem for the occasion, and a telegram from Erskine Caldwell, then living in Phoenix, Arizona, was read.

Victor Dalmas announced that the next issue of *Pembroke Magazine* would feature Caldwell and also carry a report on the Daniels tributes. Jonathan and Lucy were called at Hilton Head Island, where they lived, and both were delighted to talk by phone with some of those at the Conference.

Of the membership itself, Ragan said: "Most of the writers have other jobs. There are few full-time professional writers in America (a recent report placed the number at two-hundred-and-fifty in the entire country) but there are at least a dozen in North Carolina. Among these are Thad Stem, Paul Green, Manly Wade Wellman, Harry Golden, John Ehle, Glen Rounds, Roy Wilder, all well known as story-tellers. Many of the professionals also teach or hold other jobs." 

1979

Plantation Inn, Raleigh

Shelby Stephenson, chair; Sallie Nixon, vice-chair; Robert Waters Grey, secretary.

"Reading Sam's column about that Conference reminds me how much I miss him," Shelby Stephenson recalled in 1999, "the way he would throw that big, starry net all around, encompassing my Johnston County and the possibility of the arts, particularly poetry, where his heart is. So it is that atmosphere I see now—how Sam asked me to chair the Conference, and I said, 'What?' He said, 'Well, try to be invisible.'"

The idea arose to focus on play-writing. And that meant Paul Green. "And, lo, I put together a panel (I wrote Mark Sumner as I recall), and we came up with these names: Tom Huey would preside; Tom Woods, of High Point's Shakespeare Theatre, would participate.

"Paul Green called me and said in that definite and tentative way, something like this, 'Would it be an imposition if I asked you to ask Rhoda Wynn, my assistant oh these many years, to be on the panel—she is my right arm.' And I said, 'By all means,' and so the discussion on the panel went along, Green saying something which rings in my toes today...because of my love for Paul Green and his influence: 'I think it is really deplorable that play-writing is



Thad Stem, Jr., and Tom Walters

not being taught now at Chapel Hill. Why?" And Sam Ragan underscored that lament in his column, quoting Green as saying he had 'a list of some seventy-odd writers who had written plays and had them produced in former years at Chapel Hill.'"

The other thing Stephenson remembers most is Green standing up and speaking on behalf of Thad Stem, the honoree for that thirtieth annual North Carolina Writers Conference. "I remember him talking about Thad within the context of a fable, something about a frog that kept hopping up on a lily to survive and live and go on to write and to create beyond the spill and the days. I can still see the frog and believe it is embodied in the best of us. And Paul Green is still the gangly poet up there saying those marvelous things. And then, Thad. How I remember his wit and his promise, as I still do today."

And there was Julie Suk, who was on a poetry panel with Jim Applewhite and Cal Atwood and Sally Buckner, talking about where the unconscious comes from, all that need to create. "And Jim said something like, 'The unconscious lives somewhere in my ears or near my ears'—that God is in one of his earlobes (no, I said that) and a voice begins down in the toes and speaks up and makes sounds that work up in the socks (I'm saying this) and these tongues confuse socks with ankles so that one cannot

remember what happens to the socks when one goes skinny-dipping with Thad Stem (I never did, though Tom Walters, who was a spokesman for Thad during his part of the toast and roast, did go in that water somewhere up at a water hole Jean McCamy knows.) Manly Wade Wellman was there talking about nonfiction)"

"...And there was Suzanne Britt Jordan, one of the best essay-writers on the planet, talking about non-fiction (Walter Spearman—come back, Walter, come back) and Walter said, 'Fact.' And I said, 'Where is fact, out there within the dream? ...Out there in the line Frost wrote, 'A fact is the sweetest dream labor knows?' ...And now we have flash fiction (probably named for Gordon) and short shorts (probably named for the old Bermudas or the words like 'bikini' we cannot apply to writing because it is sexist; I'm going to invent a form and call it Hanes—can I do that? ...)"

"...And there was Ruth Moose, who was on that non-fiction panel (I think she talked about the life of a newspaper reporter living the life of a wayfaring human as part-animal that could write if it could talk and the writing would be non-fiction). And Truman Capote appeared in a puff of wine...and there was all the talk and the presences: Ron Bayes, the editor (give that man Medals!) of the *St. Andrews Review*, and the others, and so the arrangement by Shelby and Sam happened, and I was there leaving out some things as I have here—remember Sam Ragan, yes, a little ruffled at the banquet because there were so many people there. They couldn't get into the room. And Sam looked at me and said, 'Go get those people on the terrace.' And I thought to myself, 'What a wonderful world.'"

"And that happening is one of the reasons why being here is worth being here for. Onward to Manteo."

*Driving to the symphonic drama
With the music going on the waterfront
The story in the songs and dances
Paul Green's symphony
That conglomerate of all the arts
The theater once more
Outdoors with the people
Yes out here in the country* 

1980 Plantation Inn, Raleigh

Sallie Nixon, chair; Robert Waters Grey, vice-chair; H. G. Jones, secretary.

A crowd of more than a hundred was on hand to pay tribute to author, actor, teacher, and literary critic Walter Spearman, whose "Literary Lantern" column appeared in the Southern Pines *Pilot* and six other newspapers.

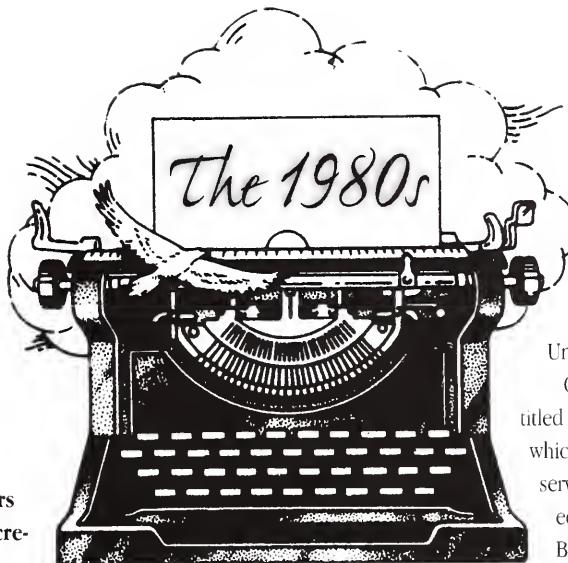
Spearman had retired the year before after teaching for forty-five years in the journalism school at UNC in Chapel Hill, and it

was brought out at the dinner that sixty-three of his former students had thus far written or edited a total of two-hundred-and-fifty-one books. Among them were Gail Godwin, Sam Summerlin, Tom Wicker, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Burke Davis, Hayden Carruth, John Foster West, Shelby Stephenson, and Robert Ruark.

Among those to pay tribute to Spearman were Roy Parker, Jr., editor of the *Fayetteville Times*, John Foster West, and Guy Owen. It was noted that the "Literary Lantern" was the oldest book review column still being published in America. It was started in the early 1920s, and Spearman was the fourth writer to conduct it. Many North Carolina writers were indebted to him for the attention he had called to their books.

The Friday night session included a panel on book reviewing with Spearman, Betty Hodges of the *Durham Morning Herald*, and Danny Romine of the *Charlotte Observer*. Guy Owen expressed the opinion that too many reviewers were passing up good books published by regional publishers. Regional publishing could well be the wave of the future, he contended.

This view on publishers was explored further the next morning when Owen was moderator for a book publishers panel, which included John Fries Blair, Ron Bayes, and representatives from



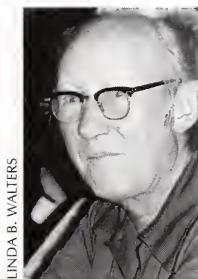
Moore Publishing and the University of North Carolina Press.

One of the liveliest sessions was one titled "Poets and the Universities," for which Robert Waters Grey of Charlotte served as moderator, and which included poets Julie Suk, Betty Adcock, Betsy Cox, and James Applewhite.

Informal workshops on poetry and fiction were conducted in the afternoon by Grey and Thomas Walters, with several writers reading from works in progress.

"Jonathan Daniels once said," Sam Ragan observed in his column, "that the North Carolina Writers Conference was the one organization he enjoyed belonging to, because it had no constitution, or by-laws, no dues, and not much in the way of officers. By that he meant the officers' primary duty is to select a site for the next meeting. To that, however, has been added the responsibility of planning a program. But these programs are never highly structured and serve mainly as a kick-off for informal talks by writers."

"The ages of [Conference] members," Ragan continued, "range from one teenager, who has published a book, to a veteran member who recently celebrated her ninetieth birthday, Charlotte Hilton Green. Mrs. Green was at this year's session, along with other long-time members such as Paul Green and Frances Gray Patton." 



UNDA B. WALTERS

Walter Spearman

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1981 Velvet Cloak Inn, Raleigh

Robert Waters Grey, chair; H. G. Jones, vice-chair; Betty Adcock, secretary.

Noted novelist and short story writer Frances Gray Patton of Durham was leaving the next day for a two-week trip to England with her husband, but she thoroughly enjoyed the reminiscences and warm-hearted tributes from three long-time friends—Mena Webb of Durham, Nell Joslyn Styron of Raleigh, and Walter Spearman of Chapel Hill.

Mena Webb related the high spots of Mrs. Patton's career—her first published story in the *Kenyon Review*, the many stories



H.G. JONES

Betty Adcock, new secretary, receives the "archives" of the Conference in 1980 from her predecessor, H. G. Jones, at his office at the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill. Jones required Adcock to sign a receipt that read as follows. "Sallie's Sad Sack" refers to former Conference secretary Sallie Nixon's donation of a previously discarded, beat-up briefcase to replace the crumpled paper bag in which the "archives" had been transferred to her.

"Received from H. G. Jones this date [1 December 1980] Sallie's Sad Sack containing the Crown Jewels of the North Carolina Writers Conference, including all the worldly possessions of said Conference (correspondence, accounts, receipt book, safety—no straight—pins, a few labels and stray rubber bands, ballpoint pen with safety chain—writers will carry off anything not chained down, and check No. 5 on Wachovia Checking account No. 2-601-524 in the amount of \$416.47).

she published in *The New Yorker*, and the collections of stories, *A Piece of Luck*, *The Finer Things of Life*, and *Twenty Stories*, as well as her best known work, a novel, *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, which had been made into a movie.

Nell Styron recalled growing up in Raleigh with Fanny Patton, who was a member of a well-known newspaper family, and of Mrs. Patton's acquaintance with many noted writers around the country and the world. Walter Spearman told of their attending classes together at the University in Chapel Hill, of Fanny Patton's long association with the Carolina Playmakers, of plays she wrote and plays in which she acted, including some of Paul Green's most noted folk dramas.

"Mrs. Patton responded with gracious appreciation of the tributes," Sam Ragan reported, "and everybody had a warm feeling about the evening. A writer only recently moved to the state said later that he was very moved by the occasion, and by the entire Conference itself. 'Writers in North Carolina really care about each other,' he said."



Frances Gray Patton and Sam Ragan

MAE WOODS BELL

Earlier sessions focused on the research and writing of non-fiction, with H.G. Jones moderating a panel that included William Powell, Marguerite Schumann, and Michael Godfrey; on poetry with a panel directed by Shelby Stephenson of Southern Pines; and on the publishing and promotion of a book by Rita Berman of Chapel Hill. Separate workshops on poetry and fiction were held under the direction of Betty Adcock and Ann Deagon.

Ragan reported that the Conference had grown to one-hundred-and-twenty-five members. Among those with new books in the works were Doris Betts, whose new novel, *Heading West*, was due out in the fall, and Peggy Hoffmann, whose book on outdoor cooking, titled *How to Bake a Snake*, was due out in a few weeks.

Angela Davis, a former reporter for the *News & Observer* and the daughter of noted writer Burke Davis, was looking forward to the publication of her first novel by Random House in the spring. Her brother, Burke, Jr., had published his first novel to critical acclaim earlier in the year. Ms. Davis, who lived in Raleigh, had won a \$5,000 fellowship from the North Carolina Arts Council, as had poet Paul Jones of Chapel Hill.

Anne Russell of Raleigh reported a forthcoming pictorial profile and commentary on Wilmington, and Suzanne Newton also had a new book for young people on the fall list. "All in all," Ragan said, "judging from the output and the lively discussions at the Writers Conference, literature in North Carolina is alive and well." 

1982

Carolina Inn and North Carolina Collection, Chapel Hill

H. G. Jones, chair; James B. Hemby, vice-chair; Agnes McDonald, secretary.

"The main accomplishment during my year as chairman of the North Carolina Writers Conference," H.G. Jones reflected, "was my preparation of a short history of the Conference, including a compilation of all previous meeting places and officers. We also created the 'ancient typewriter' symbol for the Conference. Sam Ragan commented that it looked like a brand-new machine when compared to his. When the NCWC met again in Chapel Hill in 1989 for the fortieth meeting, we updated the meeting places and officers on the new program but inserted left-over copies of the 1982 program, thus updating the history and saving a lot of money (which we did not have)."

Up until 1980, membership in the Conference was something of a mystery. "As I recall, Sam Ragan may have had the only copy of the mailing list, but when I became secretary, my training as an archivist dictated that I publish a roster of the membership. This may or may not have been a good idea, for conversations often included questions like: 'Why is So-and-So a member but Someone Else is not?' Most of us knew that Sam was the nominating committee, and this public listing may have caused him some discomfort. However, I think it also led to the opening up of slots for other writers with whom Sam had not yet become familiar, and I believe the change was salutary."

He continued for some years to publish and distribute the membership list from the North Carolina Collection. This was before the founding in 1985 of the North Carolina Writers' Network; consequently, the NCWC list was about the only directory available of writers in the state.

For the program in 1982 at the Carolina Inn, the focus was on new authors, and Walter Spearman talk-started a conversation among "First Book Novelists" Angela Davis-Gardner, Laurel Goldman, Annis Ward Jackson, and Kermit Turner. In addition, James Applewhite talk-started a conversation between "First Book Poets" Hilda Downer, Marie Gilbert, Mary Kratt, Stephen Smith, and Shelby Stephenson (Jones: "Can you imagine the time when Shelby had only one book?"). "Of course, we depended upon the real pros, Doris Betts and Fred Chappell, for the red meat of the meeting. On the previous evening, Rhoda Wynn had shared many secrets and memories about Paul Green, one of the founding members of the NCWC."

Jones said he has pleasant memories of that 1982 meeting.

However, he still has nightmares when he thinks about two problems that arose that afternoon and evening. The first: The NCWC

secretary lost the checkbook and did not remember in what bank

she had put the organization's money. "Fortunately, her friend, the Rev. Collins Kilburn, named off the Raleigh banks and their locations, and the secretary was able to identify one of them as the likely depository of our funds. We were very glad that the Inn did not insist upon payment until the following week."

The second: "As I was rounding up the people for the head table at the banquet, I tried to shoo away a red-bearded fellow dressed in what appeared to be rather scraggly attire; in fact, I did

not think he had a ticket, so I tried to show him the exit. I was about to create a scene when Sam Ragan slipped up behind me and whispered, 'He's one of the speakers!' Although the honoree, Manly Wade Wellman, had given me the names of the speakers, I had never met this other particular mystery writer, whom he had invited to speak. Karl Wagner's name is now burned into my memory."

During the fiftieth annual meeting this year, while the members of the Conference are sunbathing at the beach, Jones will be lecturing aboard the Russian icebreaker *Multanovskiy*

along the coasts of Baffin Island and Greenland. "I will try to remember on July 31," he said, "to drink a toast, cooled by centuries-old glacier ice, to the NCWC." 



MAE WOODS BELL

Doris Betts, Ruth Moose, and Guy Munger



Manly Wade Wellman and Frances Wellman

MAE WOODS BELL

1983

Atlantic Christian College (now Barton College), Wilson

James B. Hemby, chair; Agnes McDonald, vice-chair; Emily Wilson, Heather Ross Miller, and Stephen E. Smith, secretaries.

Speakers at the dinner in honor of noted novelist Ovid Williams Pierce, a native of Halifax County and teacher of literature and creative writing at East Carolina University, included long-time friend Mae Woods Bell of Rocky Mount and Roy Parker, Jr., editor of the *Fayetteville Times* and a native of the region from which Pierce came.

Ms. Bell talked about his contributions as a teacher and adviser to young people at the University and the impact he had had on the lives of so many. Parker had gone back and re-read Pierce's novels—*The Plantation*, *On a Lonesome Porch*, *The Devil's Half* and *The Wedding Guest*—and his collection of short stories, *Old Man's Gold and Other Stories*, and he agreed with an observation made by the late Lee Barker, Pierce's editor at Doubleday, who said,

"The writing is beautiful, often lyrical and always distinguished." Parker gave insight and high praise for Pierce's work, especially in his treatment of women and blacks.

One speaker, noting that Pierce's *On a Lonesome Porch* had been called a Southern classic, recalled what

Orville Prescott, writing in the *New York Times*, had said about that book:

"For sheer suggestiveness of style and limpid beauty of expression, On a Lonesome Porch is remarkable. Each sentence, almost each word, of its tightly compressed and exquisitely wrought prose is charged with emotional tension. There is a meaning in every phrase and idea here beyond the explicit meaning of the words. Rarely do intangibles of thought and feeling seem to fill the very atmosphere of a book with so rich a fragrance. Without being a bit fancy, On a Lonesome Porch comes as close to true poetry as prose ever does."

Pierce, who had just finished work on another novel, which was on its way to Doubleday, responded with appreciation, and



Elizabeth Stevenson Ives and Ovid Pierce

MAE WOODS BELL



Left to right, Roy Parker, Jr., Marie Parker, and Mena Webb

MAE WOODS BELL

said he started writing for himself, and then "for my friends." It was a moving occasion and the seventy-two-year-old novelist from Greenville received a standing ovation when he had finished speaking.

Earlier in the weekend, James Hemby, acting president of Atlantic Christian College, served as moderator for a publishers' panel, which included the dean of North Carolina publishers, John Fries Blair, along with Pat McCullough of Eastwood Press of Charlotte, Jack Roper of St. Andrews Press and Louis Rubin of Chapel Hill, who had recently launched Algonquin Press, which was to bring out its first list of books that fall.

Rubin said he believed the trend in publishing was away from New York. On Algonquin's fall list were a collection of short stories, *Passing Through*, by Leon V. Driskell; and *When the Water Smokes*, by *News & Observer* outdoor writer Bob Simpson. A big coup for the new publishing house was the autobiography of Vermont Royster, the North Carolina native and former editor of the *Wall Street Journal*. His *My Own, My Country's Time*, was expected to have big sales in all parts of the country.

1984

Plantation Inn, Raleigh

Agnes McDonald, chair; Stephen E. Smith, vice-chair; Shirley Moody, secretary.

The banquet honoring North Carolina Poet Laureate Sam Ragan, a former Conference chairman and one of its leading and guiding lights, was the highlight of the weekend for the more than one-hundred-and-forty writers who attended the 1984 meeting.

A special guest at the Conference was Sara W. Hodgkins, Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources,

who spoke at the Saturday night banquet. Others on the banquet program included Sally Buckner, chair of the English Department at Peace College, Agnes McDonald, who taught at Atlantic Christian College, and Roy Parker, Jr.

"Sam Ragan's creativity reaches out to embrace and foster others who wish to create," Secretary Hodgkins said. "He is one of our finest arts patrons and administrators. As a volunteer, he has served the State Arts Council, the North Carolina School of the Arts, the Literary and Historical Association, the North Carolina Symphony, and of course, the Weymouth Center. As a professional, he helped put together the state Department of Art, Culture and History, the nation's first comprehensive state cultural agency, and served as its first secretary. Now we call it the Department of Cultural Resources, and it's been my privilege to follow in Sam's footsteps...."

Roy Parker talked about the personal debt he owed Ragan as a newspaper editor for bringing him up from the hinterlands to work at the *News & Observer*. "I love him especially because in those days, baby, when the civil rights revolution was going on, when migrant workers were very busy in North Carolina fields, when the open meetings battles were being fought with legislators and government bureaucrats, when any poverty program was being forged, when education was a big issue to get more money mainly, Sam was always the leader, the mentor, and the guy who nurtured you when you were writing about these things."

"...'Splendid' is his favorite word," Parker later noted in his talk, "which he gives out. I mean he doesn't keep it, he gives it all the time for you and me. He's lavished it on us and now we give it back with all honor and affection."

Sally Buckner asked, "How does one toast—or roast—a living monument?" She then gave a perspective on Ragan's contributions as a scholar and poet, with a lively analysis that included a series of original poetic tributes in various forms, from ode to limrick. She concluded by saying, "In a profession notorious for jealousy, backbiting, and closely-guarded professional secrets, we in North Carolina have instead a splendid, enviable spirit of generosity.... No one is more responsible for that spirit than Sam Ragan."

In his response, Ragan said: "The North Carolina Writers Conference is something very special. I have been a member of it from its beginning, and all of you are my close and dear friends. I think back on those friends who are no longer with us, people like Paul Green, Jonathan Daniels, Thad Stem, Inglis Fletcher, Bernice Kelly Harris, Harry Golden, Tom Walters, and Guy Owen, and I hope that we will always remember them and keep them in our hearts."

Earlier in the Conference, Louise Shivers, a native of Saratoga who grew up in Wilson and at that time was living in Augusta,

Georgia, held the attention of her large audience with the story of how she became a best-selling author with her first novel, *Here To Get My Baby Out of Jail*. Then in her fifties, Ms. Shivers did not start writing until a dozen years earlier when she joined a writers group in Augusta and said she was "discovered" a few years later at a writers conference. She had spent five years writing her novel and then two more rewriting it.

Her book had recently been re-issued in paperback and had been sold to the movies. A down-to-earth writer, Shivers said writing fiction was a way of being totally alive. She reported being at work on a new novel, which she called *The Whistling Woman*, based on the old saying: "A whistling woman and a crowing hen will never come to any good end."

Manly Wade Wellman was anticipating publication of his eighty-first book in the fall and had two other manuscripts already accepted by Doubleday, which meant that his published works outnumbered his years on earth, and he was busy on a new novel. Roy Wilder's *You All Spoken Here* was soon to be issued in a major hardback edition by Viking, with illustrations by his long-time friend Glen Rounds of Southern Pines.

Guy Munger of the *News & Observer*, Dannie Romine of the *Charlotte Observer*, Roy Parker of the *Fayetteville Times*, and Shelby Stephenson of the Southern Pines *Pilot* talked about book reviewing. Munger and Romine said they had space to review only about five out of the one hundred books a week they received at their newspapers. Parker said he emphasized North Carolina books, and Stephenson said he mostly reviewed works of poetry, which were often overlooked by other reviewers. ☘

1985 Sheraton Inn, Southern Pines

Stephen E. Smith, chair; Shirley Moody, vice-chair; Mary C. Sotherly, secretary.

The emphasis was on talented new writers, and this year's Conference attracted one of the largest crowds in the organization's thirty-six-year history. Opening the meeting on Friday night at Weymouth was a special reading and discussion of the talked-about first novel, *Raney*, by its author, Clyde Edgerton, who Sam Ragan described as "a personable young writer of considerable talent."

The next morning another talented young writer, Jill McCorkle, a native of Lumberton, read from her novel, *July 7th*, and discussed its writing. McCorkle had the distinction of having

two novels, her first, published on the same day—*The Cheerleader* and *July 7th*. The novels of both McCorkle and Edgerton were published by Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. Shirley Moody moderated a poetry panel, with Gerald Barrax, Jean Morgan, and Ronald Bayes reading their poetry and talking on the theme of “Motifs in Their Work.”

The organization continued its tradition of honoring one of its members, and this year’s honored member was Doris Betts of Pittsboro, a distinguished novelist, short story writer, and teacher, who was at that time on leave of absence from UNC at Chapel Hill to work on her eighth and ninth novels.

Among those present “to speak up for Doris” were UNC President William Friday, novelist Lee Smith of Chapel Hill, and retired newspaper editor Robert Mason of Southern Pines. “Doris is a woman of such protean qualities that it’s hard to know what to say,” Lee Smith declared. “Her presence in our lives is important and meaningful.” She concluded by saying, “In a world where grace and trust are hard to come by, she offers us both, and we thank her for it.”

Mason recalled the days when Doris worked on the *Sanford Herald*, where he was editor, and was immediately impressed by her bouncy personality and her obvious talents as a writer. “What I didn’t know was that Doris would become a marvelous teacher, an adored teacher, and a capable university administrator as well,” he said.

In response, Betts quoted Peter De Vries, “I love being a writer—it’s the paperwork I can’t stand,” and she went on to offer two bits of advice to her fellow writers. “Writers are responsible for relentless asking, for demanding their own stubborn growth, for pursuing—whether attainable or not—an art which will not be merely good but great. So I advise you to keep asking the right questions.”

Her second gem was related to the first. “Though I have been around asking questions a long time, I have never yet written anything that satisfied me, and I wish for you a lifetime of that very discontent. Once your work has completely satisfied the impulse which gave rise to it, you can give away your pencil sharpener and quit. I hope all of us will be around for many years, still seeking and asking the right questions, still being dissatisfied with our own responses to mystery.” 

1986

Mission Valley Inn, Raleigh

Shirley Moody, chair; Mary C. Sotherly, vice-chair; Jack Roper, secretary.

“My memories of that year’s Conference include not only the program of events, but informal conversations with gifted writers,” Shirley Moody recalled. “After months of worried planning, somehow everything seemed to come together, fall into place and flow well. Despite the fact that we were gathered in the Mission Valley Inn, a facility different from the more rural site of previous Conferences held at the Plantation Inn, the magic of renewed friendships and encouragement was enjoyed the same as always. And even though the Conference checkbook with funds to pay for the event failed to arrive, the motel graciously allowed us to leave and mail in payment afterwards!”

Those arriving on Friday night were entertained by Clyde Edgerton and his wife Susan Ketchin, Shelby Stephenson, Stephen

Smith, and Ann Deagon reading, pickin’ and singin’. Saturday morning the gathering bragged about and speculated on why there are so many Southern writers. Sam Ragan, Mary Sotherly, R.T. Smith, Jack Roper, Stephen

Smith, and Margaret Baddour gave some humorous and scholarly opinions. John Fries Blair spoke eloquently about his publishing career and his work with many formidable writers.

“The absolute highlight of the weekend for me,” Moody said, “came on Saturday night when we honored friend, educator, and exceptional poet, Ronald H. Bayes, writer-in-residence at St. Andrews College. Sam Ragan served as our Master of Ceremonies and made the entire event—in Sam’s word—splendid. His memory in our hearts will forever keep every Conference a memorable one.”

In her tribute to Bayes, Moody talked about him as a friend and editor, the encouragement he gave to other poets and writers, and his presence over the years in North Carolina serving as a catalyst for literature. Shelby Stephenson talked about Bayes’s poetry, reading excerpts from his poems and placing them in perspective. It was a special critique of a poet who had set out to tell the story of the world and the human condition, and it was Stephenson’s belief that he was succeeding in his aim.



Shelby and Linda Stephenson

MAE WOODS BELL

St. Andrews College President A.P. (Bun) Perkinson, Jr., talked about Bayes as a teacher, his influence on students at St. Andrews, and his influence on the state through the founding of the *St. Andrews Review* literary magazine and the St. Andrews Press, which had published the work of many poets.

He recalled the words of E. T. Malone, Jr., in a recent column from *The Pilot*, about Bayes poetry, "It is like a fresh breeze lightening the mind, like a well-prepared gourmet salad. Among the ingredients are a solid measure of realism, spoonfuls of romance and regret, a flavoring of the exotic, and a healthy dash of audacity." He went on to say, "Wry and raucous and tender, Ron Bayes is a talented writer who has done a lot for North Carolina."

Bayes was born in Oregon and came to St. Andrews in 1968. "He has been there since that time," Sam Ragan observed, "and it was high time that the writers of North Carolina paid him honor for his achievements and contributions to the state's literature."

The banquet was dedicated to the memory of Manly Wade Wellman, who had died in Chapel Hill earlier that year. Elizabeth Spencer, the distinguished novelist and short story writer, was present at the Conference, as was Grace Freeman of Rock Hill, the poet laureate of South Carolina. It was announced that a new literary magazine, *The Wilmington Review*, edited by Charles Fort, would soon make its appearance. 

1987 Plantation Inn, Raleigh

Mary C. Sotherly, chair; Jack Roper, vice-chair; Ruth Moose, secretary.

"Time," says Thomas Wolfe in *The Good Child's River*, "You hang time upon great bells in a tower, you keep time ticking in a delicate pulse upon your wrist, you imprison time within the small coiled wafer of a watch, and each man has his own, a separate, time." Time was in 1987 to honor Thomas Wolfe scholar, N.C. literary historian, and North Carolina State University Professor Emeritus Richard G. Walser.

"What do I remember?" Mary Sotherly reflected.

I remember gathering armloads of crape myrtle, white and water-melon red, to fill the inn's enormous vases.... The Friday night performance, hilarious satire, the all-star billing: Judith Collins, author of Rodeo Drive Wives; Diandra Lure, Saudi Arabian Splendor; Dixie Rosalee Simpkins, Turnips and Sex in the Grass; Josephine Strong, Cutting Them Off; and Bunnie Warren, A Guide to Conference Going—the all-star cast in reality, our own Margaret Baddour, Anne Carolyn Gilbo, Judi Hunt, Suzanne McFayden, and Marsha Warren.

Her son Alex and his friend Wiley Blackburn tended bar, congenial and handsome in ruffled shirts, ties spangled with iridescent stars and moons. There were two Saturday morning panels: Mary Kratt and Agnes McDonald, discussing women's diaries, letters, journals; and the second panel: playwrights Anne Russell and Phil Hines, wittily reflecting on their craft. Vice-chair Jack Roper and secretary Ruth Moose surely, masterfully ensured that the meeting ticked along steadily as a well-calibrated clock.

"And everywhere Sam, beautiful Sam Ragan, our perennial host—his Panama hat, bow tie, his certain grace, those smiling blue eyes lighting all the dark corners...."

Saturday evening's St. Andrews Press party honored Ruth Moose for her newest book, *Wreath Ribbon Quilt*, and Judy Goldman, for *Holding Back Winter*, and also outgoing editor Jack Roper and incoming editor David Rigsbee. The hosts were N.C. Women's Expression Series editor Margaret Baddour and St. Andrews Press founding editor Ron Bayes.

I remember handshakes, hugs, wet kisses, the mingle of jewel-colored clothing—outstanding among us, Mary Belle Campbell wound in a gold-flecked aquamarine sari. I remember that steamy late-summer musk of the old inn, the whir of fans stirring a mix of scents: soaps, perfumes, aftershave—the electric current charging the air wherever writers gather....

The banquet, the toasting of Richard Walser, roasts and remembrances of Durham Herald book columnist Betty Hodges, Pembroke Magazine editor Shelby Stephenson, and host Sam Ragan, all caught in quick flashes of Mae Woods Bell's ready camera—Richard Walser's wide smile, his elegance, wit, his bumble declaration to the audience: 'Literary historians don't have anything to write about unless there are poets and short story writers and novelists. I love you all.'... And after, Jack Roper and I drove the most charming Richard Walser home....'

Then late, late, some few of the writers—who wished this time to never end—gathered on the patio of the old Plantation Inn under August stars, which seemed near enough to touch. Yes, Thomas Wolfe, 'Yes that was the time, time that dark hangs over our heads in lovely bells.' 

Charles Fort and Richard Walser



MAE WOODS BELL

1988

Velvet Cloak Inn, Raleigh

Jack Roper, chair; Ruth Moose, vice-chair; Sally Buckner, secretary.

New novelists who read from their work at Friday night's session included William Hallberg, a faculty member at East Carolina University, whose novel, *The Rub of the Green*, was a Literary Guild selection and was due to be made into a movie by Paramount. Also on the panel were Duke University religion professor C. Eric Lincoln, the author of nineteen books, including a first novel, *The Avenue, Clayton City*; Lawrence Naumoff, author of *Night of the Weeping Woman*; and Peggy Payne, whose novel *Revelation* had received considerable critical acclaim.

Lincoln talked about his early life traveling with the old Negro baseball league teams on barnstorming tours across the country. He later served as a major league scout and said he was the one who signed Willie Mays to a major league contract. His *Clayton City*, he said, was a composite of all the small Southern towns he visited with the Negro baseball teams in the years immediately before World War II.

At the Saturday session on small presses, Jack Roper, the historian and former faculty member at St. Andrews College who is a biographer (he was then working on a biography of Paul Green), talked about the major role small magazines and presses played in the Southern Literary Renaissance.

Also on the program was Whitney Jones of the Jargon Press, David Perry of UNC Press, Carolyn Sakowski of John F. Blair, Lee Willoughby of Duke University Press, S. D. Williams of the *Leader*, and Mary Belle Campbell of Whispering Pines, who talked about her plans for the Scots Plaid Press. Jones noted that in publishing it is said that the way to make a small fortune is to start with a big fortune.

This year's honored member was Reynolds Price, the author of seventeen books, including several award-winning novels, collected short stories, essays and poetry, and two plays. His books had been translated into fourteen languages. Two old friends—Doris Betts and James Applewhite—talked about Price's work and paid tribute to his achievements.

"We who are his friends and contemporary readers," Applewhite said, "know Reynolds Price as a good human presence—as a force, a figure, a voice, a many-sided, profound, courageous, warmly humorous personality."

Doris Betts recalled her first meeting with Price when he came to Sanford to talk to a group of ladies. She went on to say:

That first impression—of a young man whose good manners not only brought him to read politely to these senior citizens, and even to read at some volume since most of them were deaf—has stayed with me because it continues to function. Famous or not, he has retained an essential Southern courtesy that continues to charm, but at the same time he has never compromised his art—even then, back in Sanford perched on an elaborate crewel embroidery chair with his crystal plate of refreshments set to one side, he read aloud to the ladies a very literary story they were unlikely to find sweet or entertaining....

"The many admirers of Reynolds the man and Reynolds the artist," Betts went on to say, "were fearful when he entered Duke for surgery that his spinal cancer might eat it all—but Death reckoned without his stubbornness and courage and resilience and faith."

Price responded with warm appreciation for the tributes and honors paid him and said he looked forward to many more gatherings of the Writers Conference. 

1989

Carolina Inn and North Carolina Collection, Chapel Hill

Ruth Moose, chair; Sally Buckner, vice-chair; Marsha White Warren, secretary.

Quite a few former NCWC chairs were on hand for the fortieth meeting, including Lambert Davis, who sent out the invitations to the original gathering in Manteo in 1950. Bernadette Hoyle had made a reservation to attend, but had to cancel at the last minute, because of acute health problems. She sent along a tape recording of remembrances, which was played at the banquet. In a strong and vibrant voice, she recalled the 1967 meeting over which she presided as chair.

A little over a week later, she died at the age of seventy-seven in Smithfield, where she had returned to the home she had built many years before and after living in Raleigh for years and engaging in a variety of public relations jobs and in promoting creative writing in North Carolina. She was an excellent photographer as well as a writer and had made pictures of nearly every Writers Conference since the early 1950s.

For many years Bernadette organized and conducted her "Tar Heel Writers Roundtable" in Raleigh, and she persuaded the top



Pictured left to right, honoree Betty Hodges receives congratulations from husband Ed, daughter-in-law Gina, and son Louis Edward Hodges III during the 1989 Conference in Chapel Hill.



H. G. Jones, Betty Adcock, Sam Ragan, and Lee Smith, pictured left to right, pose for the camera in the hallway of the Carolina Inn in Chapel Hill during the 1989 Conference. (Copyright 1989, Herald-Sun Company; reprinted by permission.)

writers in the state and region to come and talk about their craft and art. "Her passing is a loss to the North Carolina writing community," Sam Ragan said. "Her friends were legion, and she will be greatly missed."

At the meeting, Doris Betts spoke on "From *The Ugliest Pilgrim to Violet*," about the transformation of her short story into an Oscar-winning short film. Ted Malone, of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, talked about sifting through the literary "Lost and Found" for hidden treasures. Also on the program were Sally Buckner of Peace College and Jim Clark of North Carolina State University, who showed the first hour of a two-hour television series showcasing living Tar Heel writers, called *This Native Earth*. Buckner talked about a forthcoming anthology of North Carolina writing she was editing, titled *Our Words, Our Ways*, which was designed to stimulate public school children to read.

At the North Carolina Collection in Wilson Library, H.G. Jones, Bob Anthony, Lula Avent, Alice R. Cotten, and Eileen McGrath talked on the subject of "From James Davis to Reynolds Price: Two and a Half Centuries of North Carolina Writers."

Veteran *Durham Morning Herald* book editor Betty Hodges was the honoree that year, and the toasters included novelist Lee Smith and poet Betty Adcock. Each speaker thanked Hodges for being fair but honest in her writings on books and authors—and for giving special attention to the literary efforts of her fellow North Carolinians. But her most important contribution to writers, they emphasized, was her sincere interest in their work.

"She is not out to get us," Smith said. "Instead she is out to understand what we are up to, to hear what we are trying to say. She has spent a lifetime doing this. She is the rarest of all possible beings in this world, a compassionate, tolerant, patient reader, always ready to meander along with us for a little while."

Hodges seemed to take such praise in stride. But when her daughter, Melisandre, walked to the speaker's stand as the surprise speaker for the evening, the journalist who had unfailingly turned out a book review column weekly since 1955, appeared dumbstruck. Melisandre shared memories of childhood play in the kitchen, curiously watching as her mother typed away on the family Underwood, creating word pictures that would appear in the next day's newspaper.

Then Adcock rose "to read a 'piece'" she had written especially for the evening—"Owed to Betty Hodges"—in which she praised the honoree for work well done. The final speaker for the evening was another surprise, Betty's husband Ed, also a Durham journalist and longtime Conference member, who delighted the attendees with his description of life at home *and* work with Betty.

In looking back at the 1989 Conference, Ruth Moose recalled feeling a bit relieved when it was over. The previous year, "[w]e overbooked the room for the banquet that honored Reynolds Price and ended up in the hole, but it was a wonderful evening. The next year, when I was chair, we honored Betty Hodges at the Carolina Inn, Steve Smith and Shelby Stephenson had a band, and Guy Munger joined them, playing the jug. We had a great time and sold enough tickets to get out of the hole!" 

1990 Governor's Inn, Research Triangle Park

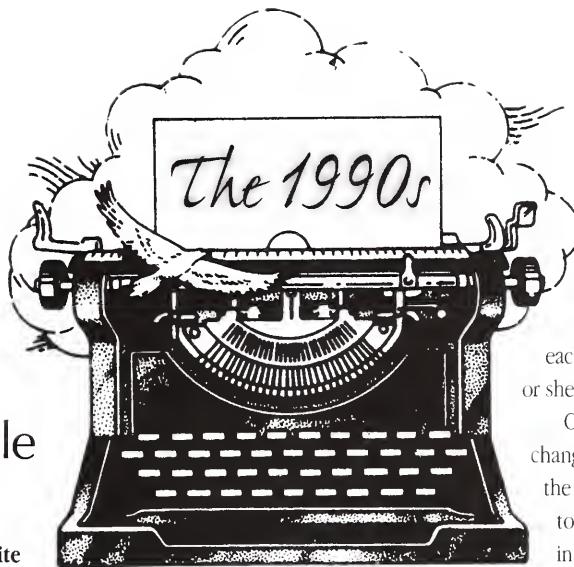
Sally Buckner, chair; Marsha White Warren, vice-chair; Mary Kratt, secretary.

"All North Carolina Writers Conferences are memorable affairs, but somehow the forty-first, occurring at the Governor's Inn in the Research Triangle, manages to occupy an even larger, brighter segment of my memory than most," Sally Buckner said. "Most of the credit must go to Marsha Warren, who designed a program whose various segments still ring chimes for me almost a decade later."

The opening event was a stunner: a reader's theatre presentation of Paul Green's 1936 one-act play, "Hymn to the Rising Sun." Directed by Rudy Wallace, this production needed no expensive scenery, orchestration, or lighting to strike home its theme: our inhumanity to our fellow human beings. The play, growing from Green's lifelong commitment to humanitarian concerns, derived from a real situation: two North Carolina chain gang members had lost feet and portions of their legs after being confined in a box during freezing weather. (To heighten the irony, Green set the play on July 4.)

Saturday the writers gathered for two panels dealing with the theme "Towards an Inclusive South." The first panel—Laurence Avery, Rudy Wallace, and Dan Wallace—thrashed through four questions prepared by moderator Jack Roper, all having to do with whether there is indeed such a thing as a "Southern" literature—and if so, what its elements may be. Perhaps the discussion was pretty well summed up by Professor Avery, who noted that if there had indeed ever been such a thing as a homogenous South, it doesn't exist today. Roper, however, insisted on the significance of the Southern novel, for "It's important to know who you are."

The second panel, moderated by poet Paul Jones, focused more on the writer's tasks, including everything from work habits to his/her responsibility to deal with social issues. Panelists Elizabeth Spencer, Denise Giardina, Pete Hendricks, and Fred



Chappell all agreed that in the end each writer has to write about what he or she has to write about.

One of the most energetic interchanges developed from a topic not on the program, but nonetheless central to the thinking of artists and writers in that year: the furor over controversial National Endowment for the

Arts grants and various proposals aimed at guaranteeing that art (of any kind) not be federally funded if it upset community standards of taste and morality. Sam Ragan reiterated his long-held view that any such proposals amounted to censorship and would have a "chilling effect" upon artists. On the other hand, Fred Chappell quoted the old maxim that "He who pays the piper calls the tune," adding that for that reason he had never applied for a federal grant.

Chappell himself, the honoree at the evening banquet, provided a remarkable moment when he rose from his chair at the speaker's table, wove through the tables to find his wife Susan, removed the rose from his lapel, and pinned it on her collar. Then he returned to his place to hear four speakers pay heartfelt tributes.

Shelby Stephenson provided the scholar's perspective, noting "the complex simplicity" of Chappell's work. Betty Adcock declared that "Fred Chappell is the best poet in North Carolina, the best poet North Carolina has ever produced, and probably the best it ever will produce," then finished her tribute with a poem addressed to him. Clyde Edgerton, as might be expected, spiced his remarks with saving humor as he explained how Chappell's work had informed his own. And, inspired by a student who had exclaimed that "Fred Chappell is—an octogenarian!" Sally Buckner described eight sides of the man and the writer, and said she then had the audacity to conclude with a four-part versified opus, "Mid-Fest."

"Of course Fred, as usual, responded with remarkable grace," Buckner recalled, "then summed up what most writers know as the core of their lives when he said 'I was miserable and sometimes joyful, and so I became a writer. Writing has made me miserable and sometimes joyful.'" ☂

1991 Holiday Inn, Southern Pines

Marsha White Warren, chair; Mary Kratt, vice-chair; Roy Parker, Jr., secretary.

The Conference opened at Weymouth Center with an evening of recollections of such writers as Thomas Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Paul Green, William Faulkner, Maxwell Perkins, and others who used to enjoy the hospitality of James and Katharine Boyd. Margaret Baddour of Goldsboro had written the script, cast the characters, and directed the performance of "The Weymouth Connection." Helping to bring these famous authors back to life were Robert Mason, Shelby Stephenson, Leon Hinton, Roy Parker, Jr., Guy Munger, and Tom Hawkins.

Saturday panel sessions included a look at "That First Book," with Melissa Lentricchia, the author of *No Guarantee*, talking about her experience. That was followed by "A New Look at Language and Theme," in which Rebecca McClanahan, David Brendan Hopes, Jaki Shelton Green, and Cathy Smith Bowers talked about writing poetry. The afternoon included small group sessions on poetry and short fiction, with Sally Buckner and Ruth Moose as workshop leaders.

Burke Davis was the honoree, the author of upwards of fifty books of fiction, history, and biography who divided his time between a home in Greensboro and a log cabin at the Meadows of Dan just across the state line in Virginia. Among those taking part in the tributes were his daughter, Angela Davis Gardner, and son, Burke Davis III, along with Roy Parker, Jr., and H.G. Jones. "Prior to the tributes," Sam Ragan reported, "there was a splendid interlude of music by Linda and Shelby Stephenson and Steve Smith."

"In 1991, when I was program chair," Mary Kratt recalled, "I asked exceptional poets Cathy Smith Bowers and Rebecca McClanahan to perform. Most had never heard of them. Cathy read her poem 'Namesake,' which told about her being named for a real little girl named Cathy Fiscus who had made the news at the time of Cathy Smith's birth in Fort Mill, S.C. As she said this, Shelby Stephenson stood up in the back of the room and sang all the verses of a folk ballad 'Little Cathy Fiscus,' which had been sung throughout the country. Cathy savors that moment and says, 'I have loved Shelby ever since.'" 

1992 Governor's Inn, Research Triangle Park

Mary Kratt, chair; Roy Parker, Jr., vice-chair; Elizabeth Daniels Squire, secretary.

"When expatriate writers entertained and taught us stay-at-home Carolina writers that year," Mary Kratt said, "I recall particularly fine speakers: Jim Wayne Miller (originally of Buncombe County, then Kentucky), Leon Rooke of Roanoke Rapids (then Toronto), and Pete Daniel of Spring Hope (then of the Smithsonian in D.C.). They spoke of exile and place, and as writers

do, lots more. Miller's grandfather's farm had become a Hare Krishna colony. Rooke was introduced by Roy Parker as 'the Robert Redford of Canada.' Rooke was such a hit, he got many invitations to return and give other talks."

Fred Chappell paid tribute to that year's honoree, Wilma Dykeman, proving once again that he or she who has been praised by "Ole Fred" is about as close as she can get to glory. "My own memory of Dykeman is her fine, calm, self-assured presence and her numerous books and accomplishments,"

Kratt said, "which so intimidated me that I assumed since she had chaired this very group some time back, she knew how the banquet would go, the tributes and response and all. Anyone who knows me also knows my family always gives instructions, or advice at the very least. I gave Dykeman none, but being the thoroughly class act she is, she had her remarks ready just in case."

The formidable hotel contract presented to Kratt for her signature was the cause of some angst. "Heretofore, we had met at small, friendly motels in Southern Pines or at the Plantation Inn. They knew us. The contract I was required to sign stated a guarantee of many thousands of dollars, all backed up by our floating, loosely organized entity of ephemeral writers. I might as well have been signing carte blanche for Ivana Trump. Writers faith it. Hotels don't."

Her finest memories of the Conference are in Southern Pines with Sam Ragan working the crowd, knowing everyone, all of the members eventually gathering at night around the pool singing with Steve Smith, with Shelby and Linda Stephenson, Clyde



Wilma Dykeman (Copyright Asheville Citizen-Times; reprinted by permission.)

Edgerton and Susan Ketchin, and "with an occasional throaty showcase song by Ann Deagon dressed all in black." Kratt noted, "We were the kind of crowd you didn't want to be next to in a motel." 

1993

Prince Charles Hotel, Fayetteville

**Roy Parker, Jr., chair; Elizabeth Daniels Squire, vice-chair;
Margaret Baddour, secretary.**

"My first Writers Conference was in 1955, at the fabulous Pisgah View Ranch in western North Carolina," Roy Parker, Jr., said. "I was a bachelor weekly newspaper editor at the time, covering the activities and achievements of the very busy circle of writers in northeastern North Carolina known as the Roanoke-Chowan Writers Group. The shining lights were, of course, Bernice Kelly Harris and Mebane Holloman Burgwyn.

"Bernice Kelly was the grand dame of the N.C. Writers Conference," he continued, "but the tone of the meetings, their raging informality and disdain for fixed agendas, was still very much set by the older white guys. They were divided into two main circles. One gathered around Jonathan Daniels, the other around James Street. As soon as the sun went down, the circles began their all-night palavers, the talk lubricated by plenty of bourbon and with the clean mountain gradually turning foul with cigarette smoke."

His most memorable moment, however, came when the writers gathered in the barn for a short after-dinner hoe-down, one of the few attempts at a formal program. "I noticed a small lady sitting in the far corner. She had been sort of brought in to see the festivities. She was old and fragile, but her face shone with interest and intelligence. The lady was Olive Tilford Dargan. She remains among the four or five writers I admire most. At that moment forty-five years ago, I knew I was in literary heaven, and in the presence of the most awesome literary person I had ever hoped to be in company with."

During his own year as chair, Parker came down with a short but violent bout of congestive heart failure only sixty days before the event, which was held in Fayetteville at his invitation, and he said "the burden was really carried by Margaret Baddour and Marsha Warren." The 1920s Prince Charles Hotel was the meeting place.

"John Ehle, the honoree, got a lot of attention. However, his daughter, the luminous actress Jennifer Ehle, then only twenty-

three, was the center of attention. The highlights of the weekend for me were the participation of Fayetteville people."

Dr. Sue Kimball of Methodist College, founder of the Southern Literary Symposium, was the main banquet speaker, along with Parker, thrown in at the last minute when someone else didn't arrive, and Canadian novelist Leon Rooke, the Halifax County native who was a longtime Ehle sidekick.

The Cape Fear Regional Theater provided the Friday night program, with the Cape Fear Players putting on the recently completed drama based on the lives and contributions of North Carolina women writers. "The social highlight of the evening was the run on wine," Parker recalled, "which necessitated quick runs to nearby quick-stops to lay in supplies of off-the-shelf stuff of uncertain vintage." 

1994

Radisson Hotel, Asheville

Elizabeth Daniels Squire, chair; Margaret Baddour, vice-chair; Anthony Abbott, secretary

The Conference returned to the mountains in 1994 for its forty-fifth meeting, gathering in Asheville, hometown of Thomas Wolfe, North Carolina's most celebrated writer. Wolfe, who died over a decade before the Conference was formed, was nevertheless a central figure at the meeting. Tours of Wolfe's home were offered on Friday afternoon, and, that evening, Asheville native and Wolfe family friend Wilma Dykeman opened the Conference with a thoughtful discussion of the love-hate relationship between Wolfe and the city he made famous as "Altamont" in his fiction.

On Saturday, Jim Clark of North Carolina State University described his discovery and editing of Wolfe's novella *The Lost Boy*, recently published by the University of North Carolina Press. A panel of native Tar Heel writers—Sue Ellen Bridgers, MariJo Moore, Mary C. Sotherly, Shelby Stephenson, and John Foster West—followed, sharing their feelings and observations about "writing out of one's own background." In the afternoon, poet Julie Suk and fiction-writer Rick Boyer led workshops.

At the Saturday evening banquet, H. G. Jones, curator of the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library and former director of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, was honored. Sam Ragan, who presided at the event, praised Jones as a distinguished historian, a talented writer, and an able administrator, but above all as a tireless worker. He quoted a former Archives and History colleague of Jones, who once observed "He worked the hardest, wrote the best, and produced the most."

As the evening of salutes to the self-described “professional North Carolinian” began, however, a Northerner stole the show. An uninvited guest, Nanook of the North (who strongly resembled Margaret Baddour) suddenly appeared from one side of the head table. Garbed in attractive Arctic furs—but seriously overdressed for July in North Carolina weather, even in mountain-cool Asheville—the Inuit (Eskimo) party crasher proceeded to nuzzle the startled honoree’s neck, waved and nodded to the delighted witnesses, and then departed as quickly as “he” had entered.

Once order was restored, *Durham Herald-Sun* book review columnist Betty Hodges thanked Jones for his years of dedication to preserving and promoting an appreciation of his native state’s history and literature. She reminded attendees that he had once been a newspaperman and teacher, but always a proud North Carolinian. Shelby Stephenson recalled first meeting Jones at one of Bernadette Hoyle’s legendary Roundtables and his excitement when the historian, discussing North Carolina, began “carrying on, waving his arms, presenting a scholarly topic … in a way even I could understand. Mainly, though, he was saying YesYesYes to the local. Here was a person from my own background saying things about North Carolina.” 

1995 Holiday Inn, Southern Pines

Margaret Baddour, chair; Anthony Abbott, vice-chair; Lois Holt Wistrand, secretary

“When we began to plan the 1995 N.C. Writers Conference, our committee wanted to meet in Chapel Hill,” Margaret Baddour recalled. “But Sam Ragan, who almost always had his way, insisted on his own town of Southern Pines. I acquiesced, sensing that this might be his last Conference. He loved the Holiday Inn on the hill there and the accessibility to Weymouth Center and to his latest project, the ‘Center for the Book,’ which he envisioned locating in the old Southern Pines Library.”

The first evening opened in a warm Weymouth ballroom with fans blowing or not blowing depending on whether you wanted to hear or not. “I announced that I had the honor of presiding at the forty-sixth N.C. Writers Conference, founded in Manteo the year I was born!” The theme for the weekend was “A Salute to Creative Writing Teachers.” Vice-chair Tony Abbott led Friday’s panel on “An Apple for My Teacher.” Gerald Barrax, Sally Buckner, Ruth Moose, and Michael Parker reminisced about teachers who had influence and inspired them.

One of the great creative writing teachers, John Foster West, was to be honored at Saturday’s banquet. West was also one of the group’s greatest characters. “His tall, baldheaded presence, with large proboscis and upturned mustache, could be felt throughout that Saturday at the Holiday Inn meeting rooms and out by the pool,” Baddour said.

“Not since the late Oxford poet Thad Stem went skinny dipping in the surf at Nag’s Head a quarter century ago,” wrote Betty Hodges in the *Durham Herald Sun*, “has the august N.C. Writers Conference been entertained by such an outrageous one of their own, let alone their honoree.”

In the morning, two noted creative writing teachers, Ellen Burlington Johnston-Hale and Mary Ann Rood, demonstrated their techniques using children from local schools as subjects. That afternoon R.T. Smith lead a poetry workshop. Another interesting demonstration involved three mountain women whose fiction writing group had succeeded in one hundred percent publication of their novels. Elizabeth Daniels Squire, Dershie McDerritt, and Peggy Parris held a mock critique session of one member’s short story.

The evening, however, belonged to John Foster West, long-time member and former NCWC chairman. He had taught creative writing for forty years at Elon College, Old Dominion University, and most recently at Appalachian State University. Two of his former students, R.T. Smith and Hilda Downer, made toasts. According to Roy Parker, Jr., in the *Fayetteville Observer-Times*, “They revealed the secret of a great teacher. In both cases, it seems when they handed in their work, Prof. West took one look at it and proclaimed that, in effect, they were full-blown writers, their stuff so good that he couldn’t teach ‘em a thing, only encourage....”

“West takes a lot of ribbing for his alleged high opinion of himself,” Parker went on. “Yet because of his generous spirit with his students, they love him for it. As part of her talk on his behalf, Hilda Downer even sang a song, expanding on the line ‘have I told you lately that I love you’ to express her devotion to his mentorship.”

West’s daughter, Betsy, spoke humorously yet affectionately about him, saying that, “While my daddy never made me rich, he enriched me.” Then six “bathing beauties”—Judi Hill, Annella Rockson, Judith Settle, Mary Snotherly, Marsha Warren, and Margaret Baddour—waltzed into the banquet hall wearing cartooned cardboard cutouts of bikini-clad bodies, and recited with the refrain, “We will never forget you, John Foster West!”

“When West himself got up,” Betty Hodges recalled, “he launched into a series of reminiscences that soon reduced his disbelieving audience to helpless tears of laughter. At his entree into



Sally Logan listens as raconteur John Foster West tells another of his legendary tales during the 1998 Conference. West, an award-winning fiction writer, was honored by the forty-fourth Conference in 1995. (N.C. Coll., UNC-Chapel Hill Lib.)

the Writers Conference in the sixties, he was so handsome, he recalled, that he early established a reputation that only increased with time. In fact, he said, at the 1963 Conference at the Plantation Inn north of Raleigh, he was sunning by the pool when editor/publisher Charleen Whisnant smacked him on the thigh and declared him 'the sexiest-looking man I ever saw in my life,' then managed to keep him at arm's length throughout the weekend."

West's theme was: "Writers I have known directly or tangentially." He described: being locked up in Prof. Clifford Lyon's office at UNC-Chapel Hill with Robert Frost and a collie; seeing the couch where William Faulkner slept in Bennett Cerf's office in New York; chauffeuring for James Dickey; and drinking martinis with Mary Hemingway.

When he finally surrendered the mike after this self-roast, John Foster West confessed, "I don't know now what is myth and what really happened, but I told my children I want the tape of this program played at my memorial service." 

1996 Carolina Inn, Morehead Building, and North Carolina Collection, Chapel Hill

**Anthony Abbott, chair; Lois Holt Wistrand, vice-chair;
Charles Blackburn, Jr., secretary.**

By any standards, this was a special year for the NCWC. "It was a sad year, of course" Tony Abbott said, "being the first year without the commanding physical and spiritual presence of Sam Ragan, who had been its presiding genius for most of its existence." It was a year to take stock and think about what the NCWC ought to be "after Sam," and the new officers—chair Lois Holt Wistrand, vice-chair Charles Blackburn, and secretary Bob Anthony—pledged to do that.

It was a joyous year also, marking a return to Chapel Hill and the beautifully remodeled Carolina Inn for the first time since 1989, when Betty Hodges was honored. The Inn, the Wilson Library, and the Morehead Building on the campus of UNC provided a magnificent setting for this forty-seventh meeting, which honored the legendary Chapel Hill novelist and UNC teacher of writing, Daphne Athas.

The theme for the meeting, growing out of Athas's remarkable 1971 novel, *Entering Ephesus*, a wildly funny, yet strangely moving story, which does for Chapel Hill what Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* did for Princeton, was "The Town, the University, and the Writer." Betty Hodges and Bland Simpson talked about "the town and the writer" on Friday evening. But in her inimitable style, Charleen Whisnant, the third panelist, proved to be a showstopper, as she reached into a hat box and produced a real human brain, floating in a jar, with which to illustrate her remarks.

Bob Anthony, Bill Harmon, and Elizabeth Spencer discussed "the university and the writer" on Saturday morning. Following their talk, Bob Anthony and his staff conducted a tour of the North Carolina Collection in Wilson Library.

The highlight of the Conference was, of course, the Saturday night banquet. Athas stole the show before it began by being wheeled into the banquet room. "She had broken her ankle at the Acropolis—a profoundly symbolic place for something like this to happen, considering Daphne's love of Greece and all things Greek," Abbott recalled. "So she was confined to a wheelchair for the event, but not in the least subdued by her injury."

Her first two toasters were former students turned novelists, Randall Kenan and Marianne Gingher. Kenan had just won the prestigious Prix de Rome and was about to leave for a year in Italy. Gingher had recently joined the writing faculty at UNC and spoke with both wit and affection of adopting Athas as her "loyal confidante and oracle." The third toaster was another former student, this time turned editor, Alane Mason of W. W. Norton, who shared with the delighted audience excerpts from letters Athas had written her when she first took a job in publishing.

Then Daphne Athas took the stage herself for her response, which included the story of her arrival in Chapel Hill in the 1930s, and a series of poems, chants, and songs. "If the broken ankle, propped up before her in a cast, bothered her, no one noticed it," Abbott said. 

1997

Plantation Inn, Raleigh

Lois Holt Wistrand, chair; Charles Blackburn, Jr., vice-chair; Robert Anthony, secretary.

"The decision to honor Glen Rounds was an easy one," Lois Wistrand recalled. "The problem was to get him to accept. Then next was worrying if he would, indeed, show up!"

Rounds was aptly identified in advance publicity as falling into several categories describing an individual as a "bird," "case" or "character," respectively defined as "a peculiar person" and "a person marked by notable or conspicuous traits."

Post-conference publicity added some interesting nouns and adjectives: "footloose"—having no tie; "infamous"—having a reputation of the worst kind; "stalwart iconoclast"—(give Betty Hodges of *The Herald-Sun* credit for that one). Marked by outstanding strength and vigor of body, mind, or spirit; one who attacks established beliefs or institutions.

"In looking at the long list of honorees," Wistrand said, "it occurred to me that most of them had, in fact, been peculiar persons. Why else would they be honorees?"

And, then, there were the attendees, which could be identified as a group of peculiar people who follow the Conference year after year to hear all about the peculiar honoree. "Just look at the other participants on that program: Stephen Smith, moderator, Roy Wilder, and Rounds's editor, John Briggs, who all seemed a little brainwashed after years of association with a 'Ring-Tailed Roarer.'"

Recently, Wistrand said, a painfully proper friend asked her what a "bird" was. "Bless his heart, he had never head the word used to describe an individual. I tried to define the word by referring to the alternatives but found that he was as confused as ever. Later, I sent a note telling him what Webster's Fifth definition was. That definition virtually includes all of the above and, certainly, coverage of the Conference confirmed that Glen Rounds fell into those categories."

Wistrand said her all-time favorite Writers Conference "bird" is John Foster West. "John is acknowledged as the notorious Conference playboy. Contrary to that reputation and to my surprise, he sent me a book, *The Summer People*, shortly after my older son, David, passed away. The inscription read, 'For Lois Holt, with much affection. John Foster West, 11/11/92.' It was followed by, 'Lois, if you read this novel all the way through, you will understand *why* I sent it to you.' Indeed, I did. It also gave me an understanding of the real John Foster West."

She also recalled that at the Conference some years earlier, the strikingly debonair mountain man was accosted by a hotel clerk and admonished that he must wear a coat and tie into the dining room. West went away, and when he returned, it was obvious that he'd taken the hotel's dress code to heart. "He had on a necktie, very neatly tied, but no shirt," Wistrand recalled, "and his buttoned sport coat came down below his short pants, making it look like he didn't have on anything else."

She listed among the characters she has roomed with at the Conference: Sally Buckner, Marie Gilbert, Susan Rose. "Talk about The Three Faces of Eve!" Not fitting any of the above categories are: Best Conference Vice-Chairman and Secretary: Charles Blackburn and Bob Anthony. The Best Bartender: Leon Hinton. "He knows how to mix the perfect vodka and tonic—a *lot* of vodka, a little tonic and two pieces of ice. It's a mix that makes for a great Conference." ☒



Pictured left to right, Clyde Edgerton and Susan Ketchin congratulate honoree John Hope Franklin during the 1998 Conference at the Radisson Governor's Inn in the Research Triangle Park. (N.C. Coll., UNC-Chapel Hill Lib.)

Saturday's program included a panel session on North Carolina literary magazines, with *Carolina Quarterly* editor Robert West, *Pembroke Magazine* editor Shelby Stephenson, and *Crucible* associate editor Katherine James. A panel on book illustration featured two husband and wife teams, Talmadge and Ruth Moose and Diane and Phillip Manning, plus a slide show by Timothy Riggs on the Douglas Gorsline drawings used to illustrate Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*. The original drawings were on display in a special exhibit at UNC's Ackland Art Museum.

Duke University historian John Hope Franklin was the Conference honoree. That spring he had been inducted into the

1998 Radisson Governor's Inn, Research Triangle Park

**Charles Blackburn, Jr., chair; Robert Anthony, vice-chair;
Joseph Bathanti, secretary.**

"A Piedmont Home Companion," an evening of readings and musical performances by Conference members in the auditorium of the nearby N.C. Biotechnology Center, kicked off the forty-ninth annual meeting. Among those performing were Susan Ketchin and the Angelettes and perennial Conference troubadours Linda and Shelby Stephenson.



Charles Blackburn, Jr., John Hope Franklin, and Jaki Shelton Green (N.C. Coll., UNC-Chapel Hill Lib.)

North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, and he was completing his work as head of President Clinton's advisory committee on race in America. James Applewhite acted as Master of Ceremonies, and tributes were given by poet Jaki Shelton Green and historians Peter Wood, a Duke colleague, and William S. Price, Jr., formerly head of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History and now a professor at Meredith College.

"It was a magical night," Charles Blackburn, Jr. recalled. "The program was exceptional, the tributes all thoughtful and heartfelt, and John Hope Franklin's response, delivered without notes, was as inspiring as it was instructive and entertaining. I was sitting next

to the podium as Dr. Franklin spoke, and at some point I noticed that the audio cord for the microphone, which snaked its way along the floor, had encircled his left foot in a loop. I thought, 'When he finishes his talk and turns to leave, I'll have to catch him.' I was planning to jump up and shake his hand before he could do himself injury, but during the course of his remarkable talk, he glanced down, noticed the problem, looked up again and nonchalantly shook his foot free of the snare—all without missing a beat. Afterward, I said to my wife, 'I hope I have that presence of mind when I'm his age.' She replied: 'It would be nice if you had it *now*.'" 



Celebrating Conference Members

The custom of the Conference's honoring one of its own began in 1977. In 1976, the banquet had as its subject "Poetry as Entertainment," but the following year in Asheboro, the Conference chose to honor Paul Green at a banquet; then, with the honoring of Jonathan and Lucy Daniels in Southern Pines in 1978, a custom was firmly established.

Year	Honoree	Place of Meeting
1977	Paul Green	Asheboro
1978	Jonathan and Lucy Daniels	Southern Pines
1979	Thad Stem, Jr.	Raleigh
1980	Walter Spearman	Raleigh
1981	Frances Gray Patton	Raleigh
1982	Manly Wade Wellman	Chapel Hill
1983	Ovid Pierce	Wilson
1984	Sam Ragan	Raleigh
1985	Doris Betts	Southern Pines
1986	Ronald Bayes	Raleigh
1987	Richard Walser	Raleigh
1988	Reynolds Price	Raleigh
1989	Betty Hodges	Chapel Hill
1990	Fred Chappell	Research Triangle Park
1991	Burke Davis	Southern Pines
1992	Wilma Dykeman	Research Triangle Park
1993	John Ehle	Fayetteville
1994	H.G. Jones	Asheville
1995	John Foster West	Southern Pines
1996	Daphne Athas	Chapel Hill
1997	Glen Rounds	Raleigh
1998	John Hope Franklin	Research Triangle Park



Part Chairmen

Lambert Davis	1950	Ann Deagon	1977
Walter Spearman	1951	Victor Dalmas	1978
Richard Walser	1952	Shelby Stephenson	1979
Frank Borden Hanes	1953	Sallie Nixon	1980
Noel Houston	1954	Robert Waters Grey	1981
Wilma Dykeman	1955	H. G. Jones	1982
John Harden	1956	James B. Hemby	1983
Mebane Burgwyn and Tom Wicker	1957	Agnes McDonald	1984
Holley Mack Bell	1958	Stephen E. Smith	1985
Fred Ross	1959	Shirley Moody	1986
Ina Forbus	1960	Mary C. Sotherly	1987
Chalmers G. Davidson	1961	Jack Roper	1988
Thad Stem, Jr.	1962	Ruth Moose	1989
Sam Ragan	1963	Sally Buckner	1990
Guy Owen	1964	Marsha Warren	1991
LeGette Blythe	1965	Mary Kratt	1992
John Fries Blair	1966	Roy Parker, Jr.	1993
Bernadette Hoyle	1967	Elizabeth Daniels Squire	1994
Walter Spearman	1968	Margaret Boothe Baddour	1995
Manly Wade Wellman	1969	Anthony Abbott	1996
John Foster West	1970	Lois Holt Wistrand	1997
Peggy Hoffmann	1971	Charles Blackburn, Jr.	1998
Bynum Shaw	1972		
Ronald H. Bayes	1973		
Mae Woods Bell	1974		
Thomas N. Walters	1975		
Eugene Grace	1976		

1999 Conference Officers

Robert Anthony, *Chair*
Joseph Bathanti, *Vice-Chair*
Katherine James, *Secretary*



